Free for Eternity
Spinoza's Philosophical Eschatology

Misiewicz, Michael Andrzej

Awarding institution:
King's College London

Free for Eternity

Spinoza's Philosophical Eschatology

Michael Andrzej Misiewicz

A dissertation presented

to

The School of Arts & Humanities
King's College London

in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

- 2014 -

Abstract

In this dissertation, I put forward an interpretation of Spinoza's seemingly intractable notion of the 'eternity of the mind', an enduring puzzle in the history of early modern philosophy. The originality of my contribution will lie in the use that I make of Spinoza's philosophy of freedom as a key to unlock what he meant by this notion. By presenting Spinoza as a philosopher who was genuinely concerned with human salvation and the need to provide an adequate response to the existential predicament posed by human mortality, I begin by motivating a serious engagement with this aspect of his thought. After presenting a critical history of prior engagements with the question, from Spinoza's own time up until the recent efforts that make up the *status quæstionis*, I proceed to examine the various philosophical elements out of which his eschatology is composed, tracing their development through his intellectual career, and subjecting them to critical scrutiny. I argue for what I call a 'qualitative' reading of Spinoza's conception of eternity, and therefore also that the eternity of the mind described in *Ethics* V should be understood as a form of 'realised eschatology', in virtue of its implicit subversion of the classic theological distinction between 'this' and the 'next' life. I argue that what qualifies a state of human existence as eternal, and so as 'deathless', for Spinoza, is the autonomous expression of one's true nature, or freedom. Caught between the expression of our true nature and the unpredictable course of 'fortune', we struggle to align ourselves with the former and live 'authentically'. To the extent that we succeed, we 'feel and know ourselves to be eternal', but these transient episodes of eternity are threatened by our own 'superficial' shadow, a kind of self-imposed captivity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my primary supervisor, Maria Rosa Antognazza, for guiding me through this journey, for her care and support, and for sharing with me the 'art of baking a soufflé'. I hope the results are palatable, and do not contain too much hot air. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Clare Carlisle for her generous attention to my work, for our many rewarding conversations, and for her friendly encouragement. Many thanks are due to all my friends and colleagues in the Philosophy Department at KCL, who have fostered a warm and stimulating intellectual home. I am grateful to everyone I have discussed these issues with, whether in the early modern reading group, on the lawn outside the library, or in the pub. I am extremely grateful to the Arts & Humanities Research Council for funding my time as a postgraduate student, without the assistance of which this would not have been possible.

My heartfelt thanks go to my friends and family - to Deanne and Mike, and especially to my parents. Not least, I would like to thank Alice, whose love has shown me a happiness that words cannot express.

Contents

He who binds to himself a joy
Does the wingèd life destroy
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sunrise

William Blake

Introduction

The thesis of this dissertation

In the following dissertation, I defend the claim that Spinoza's seemingly intractable notion of the 'eternity of the mind', as developed in the last pages of the *Ethics*, is greatly illuminated by considering it in the light of his views on human freedom.[1] Both freedom (*libertas*) and eternity (*æternitas*), as defined by Spinoza, concern the necessity (*necessitas*) with which the existence of an entity is determined by its own nature. While '[t]hat thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone', 'eternity is existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing'.[2] If this is correct, then the extent to which we human beings can partake in eternity, 'the very essence of God insofar as this involves necessary existence', depends on the extent to which we can achieve genuine freedom.[3] But human freedom, for Spinoza, is attainable only in 'this life', not in the 'hereafter'. So, although the title of this dissertation, 'Free for Eternity', may seem to imply an indefinite stretch of time, extending beyond a single lifetime, it is not intended to do so. It points instead to the conceptual relationship whereby freedom is *for*, or *stands for*, a kind of existence that Spinoza regards as eternal.

The passage in question draws a work of staggering philosophical scope and ambition to its climactic close, but continues to frustrate and enchant critics in equal measure, three and a half centuries after first appearing in print. The difficulty owes

---

[1] Benedictus de Spinoza, *Ethica*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, vol. II, *Opera* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925), p. 294, 5p20s and *passim*. Translations of this text, unless otherwise stated, are from *Ethics*, in Edwin Curley ed. and trans., *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 408-617. Citations are given in the standard form of '5' (part), 'p20' (proposition), 's' (scholium), etc.

[2] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1def7, 1def8.

[3] Ibid. 5p30dem.

as much to the strict geometrical necessity with which it implicates the entire preceding work, as it does to the puzzle posed by the doctrine that it appears to convey. With the interpretation that I put forward in this dissertation, I hope to cast some light on the subject. Although previous attempts to decipher the passage are numerous - and many ingenious in execution - I am hopeful that the as-yet unexplored (or, at least, underexplored) angle from which I approach the question will serve to further our general understanding and appreciation of this aspect of Spinoza's thought.

The originality of my contribution will lie in the use that I make of Spinoza's philosophy of freedom as an interpretative key to his thought on the eternity of the mind. It is true that John Caird, in his study of 1888, suggested that 'Spinoza's doctrine of immortality is, in one point of view, only another form of his doctrine of freedom'.[4] However, except for a somewhat elliptical gesture towards a connection between these ideas, he did not develop this suggestion much further. More recently, Matthew Kisner has argued that '[a]mong Spinoza's many philosophical aims and ambitions, none was closer to his heart than helping people to achieve freedom', a claim I hope to support in my own way in the following dissertation.[5] He also suggests, albeit in passing, that Spinoza's attempt to show the way to human freedom includes a 'soteriological' aspect. 'Even Spinoza's notion of salvation', he thinks, 'is arguably directed at our freedom, for it arises from union with the eternal, divine nature and, thus, offers a kind of liberation from the power of external forces'.[6] Entwined with this philosophical account of human salvation through union with the eternal is Spinoza's 'eschatology', defined, in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as 'that part of theology concerned with death, judgement, and the final destiny of the soul and of humankind (from the Greek *eschatos*, meaning "last")'. It is this aspect of Spinoza's thought that I hope to elucidate, picking up where Caird and Kisner have left off.

It might ring alarm bells for some that Spinoza should be linked with any theological enterprise or view whatsoever. After all, is this not a thinker whose most profound legacy may lie precisely in having courageously decoupled the concept of 'philosophy', or rational, disinterested inquiry, from that of 'theology', an essentially partisan exercise in thought control, carried out in the interests of a dominant

[4] John Caird, *Spinoza* (London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1888) p. 287.

[5] Matthew Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 1.

[6] Ibid.

religious institution?[7] Referred to at one point as the 'primary intention [*præcipuum intentum*]' of his *Theological-Political Treatise*, this separation has indeed proven to be one of the more fertile seeds of modern secularism.[8] He explains the fundamental difference between the two pursuits as follows: 'theology defines its religious dogmas only so far as suffices to secure obedience, and it leaves it to reason [the organ of philosophy] to decide exactly how these dogmas are to be understood in respect of truth'.[9] So, whereas theology serves certain practical needs and interest groups, driven essentially by questions of expediency, philosophy, in contrast, attends exclusively to the truth of things, regardless of any particular agenda.

But Spinoza's stance with respect to theology is in fact more nuanced than this. For one thing, although in the *Treatise* he seems to regard the purpose of theology as exclusively practical, he also grants that its essential principles - justice and charity - are as amenable to the 'natural light of reason' as they are to the prescriptions of the 'true religion'. For another thing, in light of the overtly philosophical project carried out in the *Ethics*, it cannot be correct that Spinoza ever set out to legislate a sharp opposition between the purely theoretical and the purely practical. After all, what is the philosophical project of the *Ethics* if not a deeply practical, indeed *ethical*, one? The sense of paradox is relieved by keeping the distinct purposes of these two texts in view.[10] The philosophical journey on which a reader of the *Ethics* embarks, moving through its successive proofs and theorems, is one that is by its nature an individual pursuit, followed to the extent to which each person's own philosophical inclination, or indeed patience, allows.[11] The theological project described in the *Theological-*

---

[7] Benedictus de Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, vol. III, *Opera* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925), ch. 15, p. 180, and *passim*. Translations of this text, unless otherwise stated, are from *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998).

[8] Ibid. ch. 14, p. 174, translation my own. Of course, the more expressly declared purpose of the text, announced on the title page, is to show 'that freedom to philosophise can not only be granted without injury to Piety and the Peace of the Commonwealth, but that the Peace of the Commonwealth and Piety are endangered by the suppression of this freedom'. See, also, Jonathan Israel's history of the influence of Spinoza's critique of seventeenth-century intolerance on the subsequent liberalisation and secularisation of Enlightenment Europe. Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[9] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. 15, p. 169.

[10] For more on the divergent goals of these two texts, as brought out with reference to a certain group of 'Dutch Cartesians', see Alexander Douglas, 'Spinoza and the Dutch Cartesians on Philosophy and Theology', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 51, no. 4 (2013), p. 567 and *passim*.

[11] Antonio Negri describes the *Ethics* as a 'philosophical *Bildungsroman*'. Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 48. It might be added that the protagonist of this *Bildungsroman* is not a character within it - or even Spinoza himself - but anyone who actively engages with the text and who,

Political Treatise, on the other hand, is concerned with society as a whole, and, in particular, with the aim of maximising the fundamental virtues of justice and charity among the wider public. The 'universal faith [*fides catholica*]' described in the *Treatise* therefore reflects the historical circumstances in which it was conceived.[12] For that which Spinoza then envisaged to achieve these practical ends may well differ from what he would suggest today. But while the *means* may vary from context to context, the *ends* remain universal, and, indeed, true:

> Theology thus understood [*Theologiam... sic acceptam*], if you consider its precepts and moral teaching, will be found to agree with reason; and if you look to its purpose and end, it will be found to be in no respect opposed to reason, and is therefore valid for all men.[13]

That Spinoza allowed for a kind of theology - 'theology thus understood' - that harmonises with philosophy is a claim that I hope will be further vindicated by the interpretation of Spinoza's distinctively philosophical theology of human mortality that I advocate in this dissertation.[14] But, if Spinoza distinguishes between a narrow and a broad conception of theology, and if his aim is to quarantine the former from the domain of philosophy, then, in order to do so, he at times seems to depend on a corresponding distinction between a narrow and a broad conception of philosophy itself. In its narrow, more specialised, sense, philosophy may seem aloof from the practical demands of theology, but in its broader sense, it encompasses a far richer epistemological approach, including a worldly and practical aspect, as well as a general sensibility conferred by the 'natural light of reason'. Susan James draws

---

having followed the sequence of its demonstrations, has climbed to a vantage point some distance from which he or she began (whether this new vista shares much in common with Spinoza's or not).

[12] Spinoza sets out seven tenets of what he calls a 'universal faith [*fides catholica*]', general adherence to which would serve to maximise justice and charity in society. Among them are at least two that we know Spinoza 'the philosopher' did not strictly believe to be true (for example, that 'God forgives repentant sinners'), again highlighting an apparent tension between the aims of theology and those of philosophy. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. 14, p. 162.

[13] Ibid. ch. 15, p. 185. See also ch. 11, pp. 201-2 (and note 27): 'although religion as preached by the Apostles - who simply related the story of Christ - does not come within the scope of reason, yet its substance, which consists essentially in moral teachings as does the whole of Christ's doctrine, can be readily grasped by everyone by the natural light of reason'.

[14] Having arrived at this analysis, I was subsequently encouraged to find that Jonathan Israel shares a similar view: 'Spinoza subverted theology, merging it with philosophy... When, therefore, Spinoza concludes his chapter on the separation of theology and philosophy by deploring the "absurdities, disruption and harm that have resulted from the fact that men have thoroughly confused these two branches…", he is not in fact upholding the separation of spheres introduced by De Witt... Rather he totally subverts theology's autonomy... In other words, true theology is philosophy...' Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, ch. 11, pp. 208-9. I disagree, however, with Israel's further claim that Spinoza was 'eliminating [theology's] role in teaching men truth and the path to salvation', because, as he also acknowledges, 'true theology' merges with philosophy in pursuit of 'truth' and 'salvation', except that the former does so in view of a 'social function'.

attention to the way in which Spinoza oscillates between these two senses of 'philosophy', depending on his immediate purpose:

> Philosophical understanding, it seems [cf. *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. 13, p. 170], must either result from demonstration or be non-existent… This argument serves Spinoza's immediate purpose by conveniently establishing that, when theologians expect people who lack philosophical training to grasp speculative truths, they are asking the impossible… Here, then, philosophy seems to be defined as a highly specialised form of knowledge, with its own rarefied and distinctive method… Spinoza's project of separating philosophy from theology sometimes pushes him towards the narrower conception, even where doing so obscures the richness of his own overall argument.[15]

By advocating a reading of Spinoza's treatment of the question of human mortality that draws on his philosophy of freedom, I will seek to uncover any possible affinity in his thought between theology, 'broadly construed', and philosophy, 'broadly construed'. In doing so, I do not claim to supersede the best interpretations in the literature, nor do I claim to have identified the sole and exclusive strand in this rich nexus of ideas. My hope is only to bring a neglected aspect back into the picture. So, although the work presented here may show disagreement with certain readings, it will be more neutral or complimentary with respect to others. Foundational to my approach has been the path-finding research into Spinoza's ethics of freedom, much of which has been carried out by scholars in recent years.[16] Equally influential for my reading, and bearing again on the possibility of a philosophical theology, has been the work done by those who have sought to restore the term '*Deus*' to Spinoza's much-maligned expression '*Deus sive Natura*'.[17] The tradition of begrudging this term any force dates back to Spinoza's own time, beginning with the earliest accusations of 'atheism' and allegations that he could not have used the word in any more than a hollow or deceptive way.

---

[15] Susan James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion and Politics*: *The* Theologico-Political Treatise (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 192-3.

[16] See, for example, Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza and the Idea of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); Stuart Hampshire, 'Spinoza's Theory of Human Freedom', *The Monist*, 55 (1971), pp. 554-66; Jon Wetleson, *The Sage and the Way: Studies in Spinoza's Ethics of Freedom* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1979); Susan James, 'Freedom, Slavery, and the Passions', in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. Olli Koistinen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 223-41; Michael LeBuffe, *From Bondage to Freedom: Spinoza on Human Excellence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom*.

[17] See, for example, Sylvain Zac, *L'idée de vie dans la philosophie de Spinoza* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963); Errol E. Harris, *Salvation From Despair: A Reappraisal of Spinoza's Philosophy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973); Alan Donagan, *Spinoza* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Herman de Dijn, 'Spinoza on Knowledge and Religion', in *Religio Academici: Essays on Scepticism, Religion and the Pursuit of Knowledge*, ed. Péter Losonczi (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2009), pp. 126-36.

By way of framing the dissertation to come, I will devote the remainder of this introduction to three aims. Firstly, by presenting Spinoza as a thinker who was genuinely concerned with the problems of human salvation and eschatology, I will attempt to motivate a serious engagement with his discussion of the eternity of the mind. Secondly, I will briefly outline the interpretative challenge facing a reader of the *Ethics* upon encountering the passage that begins at (5p20s). Finally, I will look to the chapters that lie ahead and give a brief overview of the structure of the dissertation.

Spinoza's many masks

Like many of the great figures from the philosophical canon, Spinoza has had his fair share of caricature; at times venerated to the point of legend, at others deflated to little more than an industrious integrator of prior thought, an echo chamber for existing ideas and traditions. For some, he stands out almost as a kind of anomaly, a philosopher of such standing among the greats that he warrants a unique status.[18] So profound can reverence for this 'philosopher's philosopher' be, that it is a sentiment capable of uniting historians of philosophy as diverse as Bertrand Russell, who did not blush to hail Spinoza as 'the noblest and most lovable of the great philosophers', and Gilles Deleuze, whose boundless admiration found expression in the sobriquet, 'the Christ of philosophers', adding that 'the greatest philosophers are hardly more than apostles who distance themselves or draw near to this mystery'.[19] Offsetting this hagiographic fervour is the suggestion that each of Spinoza's ideas may be little more than an heirloom handed down from prior traditions, to the extent that 'if we could cut up all the philosophic literature available to him into little slips of paper, toss them up into the air, and let them fall back to the ground, then out of these scattered slips of paper we could reconstruct his *Ethics*'.[20] The combined truth, of course, is that Spinoza was deeply engaged in the intellectual, social, and political

[18] See, for example, Negri, *Savage Anomaly*.

[19] Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1946), p. 552; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 60.

[20] Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of his Reasoning*, vol. I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), p. 3.

currents of his time, and that even though in reacting to this milieu he was informed by a plethora of existing traditions and literatures, he nevertheless gave these ideas his own radical spin and reinterpretation, bequeathing to future generations a philosophical impulse, or 'Spinozism', itself ever-capable of renewed relevance and reinterpretation.[21]

Perhaps this inherent dynamism of old and new, of rebirth and renewal, is responsible for Spinoza's philosophy being so peculiarly susceptible to a diversity of readings and interpretations, even though it may be ironic that a philosopher who modelled his methodology on the precision and exactitude of geometry should in the end be open to such a diverse legacy. For in the history of Spinoza's reception one is confronted not with a single, straightforward 'Spinoza', but with a number of different 'Spinozas'. However, with these appropriations of the famous Dutch philosopher - often seeking to recruit him as figurehead for some intellectual movement or trend - one tends to find an exaggeration of some aspect of his thought at the expense of others. A recent fashion among certain historians of philosophy to portray Spinoza as a kind of grandfather of twentieth-century 'physicalism' or 'naturalism', for example, promotes a reading that un-Spinozistically elevates extension above its fellow attributes as much as it tries to brush his religiosity under the carpet, a dimension of his thought that would otherwise jar so flagrantly with his alleged bequest of an austere mechanistic materialism. His famous equivocation, '*Deus sive Natura*', for these historians of philosophy, is a needless and perhaps even deceptive lengthening of *Natura*. For others, it 'esoterically' masks the intentions of a writer who cautiously disguised a message aimed at an elite who would be able to extract it:

> The traditional distinction between exoteric (or "disclosed") and esoteric (or "enigmatical") presentation was accessible to Spinoza… He was cautious insofar as he did not state the whole truth clearly and unequivocally but kept his utterances, to the best of his knowledge, within the limits imposed by what he considered the legitimate claims of society. He speaks then in all his writings, and especially in the *Treatise*, "*ad captum vulgi*".[22]

---

[21] Lorenzo Vinciguerra suggests, playfully, that if 'we were to parody Bergson's way of putting it, we could say that Spinoza gave rise to at least two histories of philosophy - one in which he belongs to the past and is ranked among Cartesians with his attention turned toward the ancient theologies, and one in which he is a member of the avant-garde, rebellious and subversive, polemicising against the instituted order, resolutely turned towards a thought yet to be constructed'. Lorenzo Vinciguerra, 'Spinoza in French Philosophy Today', *Philosophy Today*, 53, no. 4 (2009), p. 422.

[22] Leo Strauss, 'How to Study Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 17 (1947), pp. 111-2.

This suspicion situates critics in an interpretative tradition dating back to Spinoza's own time. For there has always been the perception that he did not invest any literal significance in the religious language with which he chose to frame his philosophy, dressing what was an essentially atheistic and anti-religious position in such terms solely in order to escape the fate of Bruno or Galileo.

But these more reductive assessments of Spinoza's philosophy have always seemed to fall short of capturing the full scope of his thought. The suggestion that, in the *Ethics*, Spinoza veiled his iconoclastic stance in religious garb simply as lip service to the ecclesiastical authorities is implausible, if only because he had already defied orthodoxy anonymously with the *Theological-Political Treatise*. But, more than anything, it is the glaring failure of these assessments to do justice to the tenor of his life's intellectual work that belies their inadequacy. From the beginning, Spinoza announced his philosophical project to be a fundamentally *ethical* one:

> After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile… I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which would be the true good… whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity.[23]

This autobiographical intimation of Spinoza's principal intellectual motivations, reminiscent of a comparable passage with which Descartes opens his *Discours de la Méthode*, reveals the rich inclusivity of his conception of the ethical.[24] Not only does this search for improvement (*emendatio*) aim at 'the true good', but it also involves a soteriological concern with the salvation, or redemption, of a troubled human existence, as well as an eschatological concern with the kind of existence awaiting the consummation of this ethical journey. Thus 'the true good' stands to deliver - or save - Spinoza from the worldly bondage of 'empty and futile' things, and in doing so afford him a share in a higher, 'eternal' form of existence. That his lifelong conception of the ethical includes this much is finally borne out in the last pages of

---

[23] Benedictus de Spinoza, *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, vol. II, *Opera* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925), p. 5, §1. Translations of this text, unless otherwise stated, are from *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, in Curley ed., *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I, pp. 7-45. Citations give the section number, following the now standard sequence introduced by Bruder. Benedictus de Spinoza, *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, ed. Carl H. Bruder, vol. II, *Opera quae supersunt Omnia* (Lipsiae: Typis et sumtibus Bernh. Tauchnitz jun., 1844).

[24] René Descartes, *Discours de la Mèthode*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, vol. VI, *Oeuvres de Descartes* (Paris: Vrin, 1964-76), pp. 1-78. References to this edition of Descartes' works will henceforth be abbreviated as 'AT'.

his masterpiece, the tellingly titled *Ethics*, in which he marks out the way to 'salvation, or blessedness, or freedom [*salus seu beatitudo seu libertas*]'.[25]

The notion of the eternity of the mind was therefore of undeniable importance to Spinoza, and although the passage which follows (5p20s) is, as Edwin Curley has said, 'more than usually obscure' (even by Spinoza's standards), and indeed more than usually difficult, it deserves to be taken seriously and its meaning must be sought if justice is to be done to Spinoza's philosophy.[26] It would leave something to be desired from an engagement with his thought were one to follow Jonathan Bennett's advice: '[t]hose of us who love and admire Spinoza's philosophical work should in sad silence avert our eyes from the second half of Part 5', an 'unmitigated and seemingly unmotivated disaster'.[27] Although Bennett's frustration is understandable, for this passage is, as Curley says, even more inscrutable than one normally expects from Spinoza, the challenge of trying to uncover the meaning of his notion of the eternity of the mind is nevertheless one that deserves to be confronted, even if in the end that meaning should be found to consist more in a kind of philosophical fantasy than anything more substantive, or to be deficient in some other way.

A puzzling twist in the Ethics

At (5p20s), the reader is invited to set aside 'this present life' because it is 'time now to pass to those things which pertain to the Mind's duration without relation to the body'.[28] Even by itself there is something provocative in this overture, but it is all the more striking because of its incongruity within the context of the *Ethics*. In particular, the reader is surprised by Spinoza's suggestion that he is going to elaborate a sense in which the mind might outlive the body - beyond 'this present life' - because this would appear to contradict what he has already said about the relationship between mind and body in Part II, itself a consequence of the substance monism that he has developed in Part I. That is, because 'in Nature there is only one

[25] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p36s.

[26] Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I, p. 606, note 13.

[27] Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 375, 357. To be fair to Bennett, he does acknowledge that his 'adverse judgement on it should be defended', even if he 'would like to excuse [himself] from discussing it'.

[28] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p20s.

substance', a thesis proven in the first fourteen propositions of the work, it follows eventually that 'the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that', and so also, in particular, that any individual mind (which Spinoza calls an '*idea*') and its corresponding body (the mind's '*ideatum*') are in fact 'one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways'.[29] But if the mind and body are indeed in a sense 'one and the same thing', as Spinoza has demonstrated in Part II, then should it not just follow as a matter of course that the mind and body are exactly contemporaneous with each other, from beginning to end? And if so, then in what possible sense could the mind outlive 'this present life'?

That Spinoza is suggesting that the mind might survive the death of the body therefore throws up what appears to be a sudden twist in the narrative of the *Ethics*, and it is perhaps at first tempting to brush it aside. Perhaps this is just a misleading way of introducing a consideration of the mind in abstraction from its necessarily bodily circumstances of existence, a suggestion that would in fact be in keeping with Spinoza's principle of the strict heterogeneity of the different attributes.[30] But alas the twist is not so easily untwined, as becomes evident over the course of the ensuing propositions. In particular, Spinoza appears to explicitly confirm the parallelism-contradicting claim that was only suggested at (5p20s), declaring outright, 'The human Mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the Body, but something of it remains which is eternal.'[31] Here there really does seem to be a stronger claim to the effect that there is a real existence of the mind (or at least 'something' thereof) that outstrips that of the body, a claim in clear violation of the identity of mind and body established at (2p7s). For many, this is the most obviously problematic and urgent form in which the puzzle of Spinoza's discussion of the eternity of the mind presents itself, a puzzle so mystifying that it has sparked an even wider array of opinion than one normally finds among the commentators. Indeed, if Spinoza is peculiarly susceptible to a rich and varied legacy at the best of times, then in the case of his discussion of the eternity of the mind, he is just about 'all things to all people'.

---

[29] Ibid. 1p14c1, 2p7s.

[30] Ibid. 1p10: 'Each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself.'

[31] Ibid. 5p23.

The structure of this dissertation

In Chapter 1, I will consult the rich tapestry of prior engagements with Spinoza's eschatology. Starting with the earliest attempts to come to terms with this aspect of his thought and concluding with an appraisal of the more prominent readings that make up the contemporary *status quæstionis*, a valuable moral to be gleaned from this survey will be that, for many of the readings currently on offer, there are certain precedents already in the literature well worth rereading for their insights, and in some cases, old wine in new bottles. Steven Nadler's 'suggestion... that for Spinoza, after a person's death, what remains of the mind eternally - the adequate ideas, along with the idea of the essence of the body - all disperses and reverts back to the infinite intellect of God' in fact joins an established tradition of 'Averroist' readings.[32] Again, Nadler's portrayal of Spinoza as a 'naturalist' or 'atheist', such that any 'religiously charged doctrine goes against every grain of his philosophical persuasions', is to echo a view that for a long time was almost a platitude among European thinkers (though the term 'atheism' certainly meant something different then to what it does nowadays).[33] Conversely, an acknowledgement of Spinoza's (highly idiosyncratic) religiosity, recently gaining momentum again, echoes the great turning point in Spinoza's reception that rippled outwards from Germany towards the end of the eighteenth century. Keeping this chequered history of Spinoza's reception in view helps, if anything, to highlight the incredible malleability - or conceptual fluidity - of the broad terms often used to characterise positions in philosophy. This is as true of the familiar *grands mots*, 'naturalism', 'rationalism', and 'religiosity', as it is of the more specific terms that describe the workings of a particular doctrine, in this case, 'eternity', 'mind', and 'immortality'. Allowing a shift of meaning in some of these terms, while holding others fixed, is an interpretative decision that requires justification. Conversely, if it is granted that Spinoza reshaped many of the traditional terms at his disposal, then it might be expected that this be

[32] Steven Nadler, 'Eternity and Immortality in Spinoza's *Ethics*', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 26, no. 1 (2002), pp. 242-3.

[33] Ibid. pp. 243-4.

applied to his conceptual topography more generally. I will therefore bring Chapter 1 to a close with Clare Carlisle's sage advice regarding the way we approach this innovative use of traditional philosophical and theological language.

The task of reconsidering Spinoza's eschatology in the light of his philosophy of freedom will begin, in Chapter 2, by clarifying the relationship in his thought between the 'immortality of the soul' and the 'eternity of the mind'. This clarification will proceed by tracing the progression in Spinoza's thought from his earlier work, the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, in which he makes liberal use of the language of the 'immortality of the soul [*onsterfelykheid van de ziel*]', to his later masterpiece, the *Ethics*, in which he dispenses with this phraseology, opting instead to frame his discussion in terms of the 'eternity of (part of) the mind [*æternitas (partis) mentis*]'.[34] A common strand will be found in the ethical ambitions of both texts, each setting out a path towards a state of human fulfilment that is at once cognitive, psychological, agapic, moral, and spiritual. On the holistic conception advanced in both texts, no single one of these aspects is to be realised in isolation, but rather all are to issue as parallel expressions of one and the same ethical condition. The cognitive improvement which consists in the acquisition of more and more adequate ideas is reflected, in practical terms, in the manifestation of more and more virtuous forms of behaviour and interactions with others, while, 'spiritually', both of these aspects consist in a gradually improving '*salus*', which connotes as much a sense of spiritual salvation, as it does a sense of health or wellbeing. Similarly, in both texts, the eschatological aspect of this ethical condition is one that is realised in 'this', as opposed to the 'next', life. However, whereas the later work arrives at a more definitive expression of this kind of 'realised eschatology', the earlier work contains only glimmers of it that remain ultimately obscured by a more temporally construed 'afterlife'.[35] But because Spinoza's eschewal of these more traditional vestiges in the *Ethics* is not accompanied by a renunciation of the eschatological concerns of the earlier work *tout court*, it remains to be seen whether the position presented in the later work warrants the language of 'immortality' or 'deathlessness'.

---

[34] Benedictus de Spinoza, *Korte Verhandeling van God, den Mensch, en des zelfs Welstand*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, vol. I, *Opera* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925), pp. 3-121. Translations of this text, unless otherwise stated, are from *Short Treatise on God, Man and his Well-Being*, in Curley ed., *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I, pp. 53-156; Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p20s and *passim*.

[35] Charles H. Dodd is credited with coining the term 'realised eschatology'. Charles H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1935), p. 23.

Seeking to explicate the sense in which the eternity of the mind pertains to a condition - or *quality* - of existence in this life, I will in Chapter 3 probe the meaning of 'eternity' and its opposite, 'duration', within Spinoza's metaphysical framework. In order to unpack what Spinoza means by referring to these two notions as 'species [*species*]', I will suggest an interpretation whereby the metaphysical category to which they belong is to be understood by close analogy with that of the 'attributes [*attributi*]'. For both 'attributes' and 'species' express the being of substance in such a way that it is cognisable by a suitably attuned intellect, though in neither case does this render the category 'merely' subjective. Following Descartes, for whom an attribute is the 'principal property' constituting the 'nature and essence' of a substance by which it 'affects us' in its being, Spinoza likewise understands the attributes as (jointly) constituting the essence of God (or substance) 'through which we come to know him in himself'.[36] But, whereas the attributes in this way serve to express the nature or essence - the 'whatness' - of substance, the species in contrast serve to express its 'thatness', yet still essentially with reference to how this is cognisable by a suitably attuned intellect. The two categories, attributes and species, are thus mutually dovetailing, each supplying a necessary dimension of being, which is thus essentially cognisable.

Paving the way for an examination of Spinoza's account of cognition, and, in particular, the form of cognition he describes as being framed 'under a species of eternity [*sub specie æternitatis*]', which features prominently in the demonstration of the mind's eternity in *Ethics* V, Chapter 4 will set out the philosophy of mind (and body) on which this account depends. The exposition will proceed at first genetically, tracing a gradually evolving conception of mind (and body) through the successive stages of Spinoza's intellectual development. This approach will yield the interesting observation that there would appear to be a correlation between the development of this side of Spinoza's thought and that of his eschatology. For the earlier *Short Treatise*, which founders under a tension between its occasional hints of a realised, this-life, eschatology and its blurring of temporality with eternity, is also a work in which one finds a distinctly pre-*Ethics* conception of mind (and body). In fact, given the palimpsestic nature of the text, it is possible to discern the distinct stages of a

[36] René Descartes, *Principia Philosophiæ*, §53, AT VIII.25. Translations of this text, unless otherwise stated, are from *Principles of Philosophy*, in John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch ed. and trans., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1985), p. 210. This translation of Descartes' works will henceforth be abbreviated as 'CSM'. Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, I, p. 73.

gradually maturing conception. This will invite a hypothetical 'geology', as it were, from which a timeline for the evolution of Spinoza's views on the mind (and body) will be conjectured. As a result, it will be suggested that the ambiguity evident in the eschatology of the *Short Treatise* is at least partly a consequence of this earlier vacillation on the question of the mind and its relationship to the body, for these pre-*Ethics* conceptions still effectively allow for a Cartesian basis on which to defend an orthodox and temporally construed immortality of the soul.

With this groundwork in place, I will in Chapter 5 expound Spinoza's theory of cognition, with particular attention given to the relationship between this epistemological capacity of the mind and the metaphysical category of 'species'. A correlation will be mapped out between Spinoza's hierarchy of the varieties of cognition and the alternative expressions of existence meant by the species of duration and eternity, with the 'imagination [*imaginatio*]' corresponding to existence *qua* temporal, changing, and fortuitous, and 'reason [*ratio*]' and 'intuitive knowledge [*scientia intuitiva*]' corresponding to existence *qua* eternal, fixed and necessary.[37] This will be followed by a closer examination of each rank in the cognitive hierarchy and the essential differences between them, which will be shown to consist not, as a popular rendering of Spinoza's 'rationalism' often implies, in the denigration of the senses or the imagination, but rather in a more fundamental distinction between autonomy and heteronomy. In this respect, Spinoza's account of cognition anticipates the core Enlightenment value of wresting oneself free from the coercion of dogmatic authority in order to direct one's thoughts according to the demands of rational thought itself. It is at this point, in the move from dependence on the external and arbitrary towards the immanent and essential, that freedom announces itself as the core principle in Spinoza's ethical project. After noting Spinoza's revival of the notion of a noetic union between knower and known, in the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas, the chapter concludes with a suggestion for how this might bear on the question of the eternity of the mind.

Having identified freedom as marking the essential difference between higher and lower varieties of cognition, I will in Chapter 6 turn to investigate this fundamental quality further. As might be expected, the very same aspects of the ethically accomplished condition described in both the *Short Treatise* and the *Ethics* - the cognitive, psychological, agapic, moral and spiritual – come to be seen as, each in

[37] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p40s2.

their own way, a form of freedom. But, before a case can be made for attributing to Spinoza a conception that encompasses all these parallel expressions of human freedom, an urgent justificatory challenge must be met. For if freedom really is to be allocated so central a role in his system, then Spinoza must first be exonerated of the longstanding charge of having denied that there is any such thing as human freedom at all. The challenge presents itself on two fronts, the first occasioned by the apparent conflict between Spinoza's strict (necessitarian) determinism and the compossibility of human freedom, and the second occasioned by the apparent conflict *among* Spinoza's own various notions of freedom. Whereas the freedom to 'think as one pleases and say what one thinks [*sentire, quæ velit, et quæ sentiat, dicere licere*]', defended in the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise*, is to be granted universally to all citizens in a state, the freedom enjoyed by the ethically accomplished 'free man [*homo liber*]' of the *Ethics* is a hard-won prize, 'as difficult as it is rare'.[38] So what, if anything, could these various kinds of freedom have in common? Drawing on the work of Susan James and others, I present Spinoza's multifaceted conception of freedom as stemming from a deeper commitment to a classical, republican, notion of self-determination and self-legislation, reinforced by his own experiences of the political landscape in the young Dutch Republic. In this deeper commitment lies the unity binding together his various notions of freedom, which is in fact expressed, rather than problematised, by the metaphysical definition at (1def7).

But why a condition of human freedom should carry eschatological, as well as cognitive, psychological, agapic and moral, consequences remains to be shown. In order to prepare the way for an elucidation of this specifically spiritual dimension of ethical fulfilment, I will in Chapter 7 return to Spinoza's metaphysics. For it will turn out that freedom enjoys an important ontological status within the system, and especially with respect to the distinction between eternity and duration. This will be spelled out via a somewhat indirect route, beginning with an evaluation of the fundamental character of Spinoza's conception of reality (and its opposite, 'mere' appearance). After considering several popular ways of marking the distinction in his thought between that which is real and that which is only apparent, each attempt will

[38] Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, ch. 20, p. 239. The slogan that Spinoza chooses for the title of the final chapter in the *Treatise* is from Tacitus: '*ubi sentire quæ velis et quæ sentias dicere licet*'. Tacitus, *Histories*, trans. C. H. Moore, in *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931). See also Benedictus de Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus*, in Carl Gebhardt ed., *Opera* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925); Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p66s and *passim*; 5p42s.

be shown to be incapable of accommodating the truly revolutionary form of Spinoza's metaphysics, which is shaped, above all, by a framework of immanence. In place of these deficient demarcations, it will be suggested that Spinoza re-construed the classical philosophical opposition between reality and appearance, translating it instead into an opposition between the 'inmost essence of things' and a 'superficial' view of them. But existing according to one's 'inmost essence' just is, for Spinoza, what it is to be free, while those aspects of ourselves that are 'superficial' are those that issue at least partly from outside our true nature, rendering us, to that extent, unfree. When viewed *sub specie æternitatis*, as opposed to *sub specie durationis*, things are understood according to their 'inmost essence', excluding those aspects of ourselves which manifest themselves only superficially. What 'remains' from such a standpoint includes only those aspects of ourselves that are truly free, which equate, of course, to those expressions of our nature that are cognitively enlightened, psychologically temperate, loving, morally virtuous, and spiritually fulfilled.

Having set out these metaphysical foundations in the preceding chapter, I will in Chapter 8 take stock of the key results that have emerged over the course of the dissertation, as well as confront the notorious passage beginning at (5p20s). I will begin by expanding on the importance of freedom in Spinoza's philosophical eschatology, both in his earlier and his later work. In addition to supplying the content required by a 'qualitative' rendering of 'eternity', as discussed in Chapter 2, the idea of freedom will be shown to help determine what Spinoza means by a kind of existence that is 'deathless' or 'free from death'. Without attempting to 'psychologise' any of the objective workings of Spinoza's doctrine, I will point to an illuminating connection between the centrality of freedom in his philosophy generally, and its profound importance to him in the context of his life and times. The bulk of the chapter will contain an attempt to reconcile the interpretation of Spinoza's doctrine of the 'eternity of the mind' as a form of 'realised eschatology' that has emerged over previous chapters with the claim that he is not simply reducing this doctrine to therapy aimed at alleviating the fear of death. While this does figure as a corollary of Spinoza's mature eschatology, it does not exhaust its significance. Seeking to uncover the additional metaphysical sense that he bestows on his treatment of this issue will lead to a confrontation with the most recalcitrant proposition in the passage under consideration: 'The human Mind cannot be

absolutely destroyed with the Body, but something of it remains which is eternal.'[39] Various possibilities for understanding this apparent violation of Spinoza's definition of eternity as timelessness will be considered, drawing on the distinction between the 'superficial' and the 'authentic' developed in the previous chapter. However, the final answer to this particular question will have to remain somewhat guarded, and even uncertain. This will suggest that there may even be something intractable about this particular aspect of the doctrine, owing possibly to the nature of its 'content', if that is even an appropriate term for it. For if the eternity of the mind turns, in a crucial way, on the acquisition of *scientia intuitiva*, and an immediate episodic grasp of the all-animating source of existence in which this special kind of cognition consists is, by definition, distinct from the sequential structure of *ratio*, then perhaps it should be unsurprising that the elaborate sequence of arguments conveyed in the *Ethics* may in the end be incapable of capturing this deeply experiential, yet metaphysically concrete, orientation towards life (and freedom from death). Struggling to deploy his words and inferences in aid of a task to which they may be essentially inadequate, and acknowledging the peculiarity of his allusions to a more temporal eternity of the mind, since 'eternity can neither be defined by time nor have any relation to time', Spinoza points to the crux of the difficulty, if not the denouement for all our confusion: '*still*, we feel and know by experience that we are eternal'.[40]

[39] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p23.

[40] Ibid. 5p23s, emphasis added.

What may this mean
That thou, dead corpse, again in complete steel,
Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous, and we fools of nature
So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
Say why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Chapter 1

In the Footsteps of Others

Before venturing my own account of Spinoza's mature eschatology, and especially as it culminates in the passage beginning at (5p20s), I will consider some of the more prominent readings that have come before. In the introduction to the dissertation, I gave reasons for taking this aspect of Spinoza's thought seriously, and so have already discounted the approach (or non-approach) of complete dismissal that, for example, Bennett at one point appeared to recommend (but, curiously, did not himself follow). This 'approach' would be leaving out a dimension of Spinoza's thought about which he cared a great deal. I have also discounted the hypothesis that Spinoza was writing disingenuously, or 'esoterically'. While this hypothesis goes further than outright dismissal in at least postulating some intelligible intentions in writing the passage, it too ultimately fails to take seriously the explicitly soteriological and eschatological dimensions of Spinoza's philosophy, in light of which it would seem that the passage does express some kind of meaningful doctrine. In any case, the suggestion that Spinoza wrote duplicitously in order to 'cover his tracks', or for the benefit of a few in the know, does not stand up to scrutiny. As Frederick Pollock remarked concerning any alleged posturing in the passage, 'it would be a curious thing that he began to think of saving appearances after he had written nine-tenths of the *Ethics* without the slightest regard to any such prudential economy'.[1] What, then, have others taken the meaning of the doctrine to be?

[1] Frederick Pollock, *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1880), p. 276.

Early reckonings

The earliest engagement with Spinoza's eschatology of which we have a record is to be found in his correspondence with Willem Van Blyenbergh, a grain merchant with a lively interest in theological matters.[2] After initiating the exchange with Spinoza, raising some qualms that he had with the philosopher's deviation from orthodoxy on the nature of God, and eventually meeting with him in Leiden, Blyenbergh challenged the consistency of his views on the fate of the mind, or soul, after the death of the body. In order to appreciate Blyenbergh's challenge, it is necessary to supply some of the intellectual context, and as with much of Spinoza's thought, this must be done with reference to his illustrious predecessor, René Descartes. For Descartes had claimed to have answered the call of the Lateran Council to uphold the truth of orthodox Christian doctrine in the face of heretical and 'Averroist' denials of personal immortality:[3]

> [T]hese arguments are enough to show that the decay of the body does not imply the destruction of the mind… [T]he human body, in so far as it differs from other bodies, is simply made up of a certain configuration of limbs and other accidents of this sort; whereas the human mind is not made up of any accidents in this way, but is a pure substance… And it follows from this that while the body can very easily perish, the mind is immortal by its very nature.[4]

Spinoza, on the other hand, developed a view of the mind that was apparently in deliberate contradistinction to that advocated by Descartes. As Lodewijk Meyer explained in the preface to his friend's geometrical exposition of *Descartes' "Principles of Philosophy"*, whereas 'Descartes only assumes... that the human mind is a substance

---

[2] Letters 18-24, 27; Benedictus de Spinoza, *Epistolæ*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, vol. IV, *Opera* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925), pp. 79-161. Translations of this text, unless otherwise stated, are from *Spinoza: The Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley, with introduction and notes by Steven Barbone, Lee Rice and Jacob Adler (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1995). For a study of Spinoza's correspondents and associates, see Koenraad O. Meinsma, *Spinoza et son cercle: Étude critique historique sur les heterodoxies hollandaise*, trans. S. Roosenberg and J.-P. Osier (Paris: Vrin, 1983). On Blyenbergh, see p. 208 and *passim*.

[3] The Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517) issued as one of its decrees that 'each and every philosopher who teaches publicly in the universities or elsewhere... when they explain or address to their audience the principles or conclusions of philosophers, where these are known to deviate from the true faith - as in the assertion of the soul's mortality or of there being only one soul ['Averroism'] or of the eternity of the world and other topics of this kind - they are obliged to devote their every effort to clarify for their listeners the truth of the Christian religion...' *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (Washington, D.C: Sheed & Ward, 1990), p. 606.

[4] Descartes, *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, 'Synopsis of the following six Meditations', AT VII.14. Translated in CSM, vol. II, p. 10. These arguments clearly were not 'enough' for Mersenne, however, who complained: '[Y]ou say not one word about the immortality of the human mind. Yet this is something you should have taken special care to prove and demonstrate.' Ibid. 'Second Set of Objections', p. 91, AT VII.127-8.

thinking absolutely', Spinoza shows that 'just as the human Body is not extension absolutely, but only an extension determined in a certain way... so also the human Mind, *or* Soul, is not thought absolutely, but only a thought determined in a certain way'.[5] On these grounds, Blyenbergh challenged Spinoza:

> You hold that... just as the human body is not Extension absolutely but only Extension determined in a definite way... so too the human mind is not Thought absolutely but only Thought determined in a definite way... From this I think it seems to follow that... just as the human body on its disintegration is resolved into the thousands of bodies of which it was composed, so too our mind, when it leaves the body, is resolved again into the multitude of thoughts of which it was composed... so too after death our thinking substance is dissolved in such a way that our thoughts or thinking substances remain, but their essence is not what it was when it was called a human mind.[6]

As in the presentation of the puzzle in the previous chapter, Blyenbergh presents the problem with Spinoza's eschatology as one of consistency. How can Spinoza insist that the mind is, like the body, a certain modification of substance, yet at the same time hold that the mind (or, at least, 'something' thereof) retains enough of a claim to its erstwhile essence and identity to continue in existence when the very locus of identity itself, the body, loses its specific configuration at death? Unfortunately we do not know what Spinoza's considered response to this challenge was, since he chose somewhat brusquely to discontinue his correspondence with Blyenbergh.[7] But out of the resources of Spinoza's philosophical system and things that he does say elsewhere, it is possible to reconstruct a riposte that rises to the challenge. In effect this is what will emerge by way of the interpretation advocated in the following chapters. But this being a result awaiting consummation of the dissertation as a whole, it will have to suffice here simply to gesture in the direction of Spinoza's best available response. Essentially, he would want to reply that, although the mind and body are alike in both being limited modifications of substance (and in fact are in a certain sense 'one and the same thing'), nevertheless the nature of the mind (which is as distinct from the nature of the body as the nature of thought is from that of extension) is such that its share in eternity is at

---

[5] Benedictus de Spinoza, *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Phiosophiæ*, in *Opera*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, vol. I (Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1925), pp. 127-281. Translations of this text, unless otherwise stated, are from *Descartes' "Principles of Philosophy"*, in Curley ed., *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I, pp. 224-346.

[6] Letter 24; Spinoza, *The Letters*, p. 171.

[7] It may be that Spinoza is at least partly to blame for the confusion and eventual breakdown of this exchange. See Spinoza, *The Letters*, Introduction, p. 24. For a more charitable portrait of Blyenbergh, see Gabriel Albiac, *La synagogue vide: les sources marranes du spinozisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), 428-34.

once something to be experienced, something to be actively enriched, and something that involves a certain transcendence of the particular vantage point in space and time from which one cognitively grasps the whole.

However, not all early engagements with Spinoza's eschatology returned this same verdict of inconsistency. Pierre Bayle, for example, in his *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* of 1695, far from finding any notion of a post-mortem destiny for the soul to contradict the fundamental principles of the *Ethics*, claimed that Spinoza was in fact 'obliged by his theory to admit the immortality of the soul since he considers himself as a modification of an essentially thinking being'.[8] Without expanding further on why this should follow, nor unfortunately referring directly to the critical passage in *Ethics* V, Bayle adds a characteristically colourful conjecture concerning Spinoza's commitments on the question of eternal punishment. 'Tiberius, Caligula, and a hundred others', he suggests, are precisely 'the kinds of modifications' who, when they 'get angry at other ones' and 'torture them... would make this punishment eternal if death did not prevent it'.[9] So it is conceivable that, in the darkest corners of the universe, there are more powerful, even infinitely more powerful, modifications of the same malicious persuasion, whose role it is to administer eternal punishment to the sinner: 'He does not at all escape justice then by death or avoid the caprice of his invisible persecutors. They can follow him wherever he goes and mistreat him in all the visible forms that he may assume'.[10]

But the eccentricities of this conjecture seem extravagant, even by Bayle's standards, in view of something he himself had taken care to note in that same article on Spinoza. For the theology of eternal reward or punishment, he points out, is either, for *les esprits forts*, that ingenious 'stratagem' by which 'the first authors of religion' captured the hopes and fears of the masses, or, for the pious, the essential and authentic purpose of 'the true religion'.[11] Either way, this provides the sole purpose of religious devotion:

[8] Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, trans. Richard Popkin (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 322.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid. p. 323.

[11] Ibid. p. 294, note 'e'.

> All the religions of the world, *the true one as well as the false ones*, turn on this great pivot, that there is an invisible judge who, after this life, punishes and rewards the actions of mankind, both exterior and interior.[12]

Whatever 'the true religion' may be, Bayle contrasts this theology of eternal reward and punishment with the teachings of those 'who deny the immortality of the soul':

> Observe that those who deny the immortality of the soul and Providence, as the Epicureans did, are those who maintain that men should apply themselves to virtue on account of its excellence and because one finds enough advantage in the practice of morality in this life not to have anything to complain about. *This is undoubtedly the doctrine Spinoza would have put forth if he had dared to dogmatise publicly*.[13]

In fact, Spinoza did dare to publicise this doctrine, in both his earlier and his later writings. 'Sadness, despair, envy, fright, and other evil passions... are the real hell itself', he explained in the *Short Treatise*, whereas the 'knowledge' whereby 'we attribute everything to God, love him alone... and offer ourselves entirely to him', which turns out, in practice, to living a life of virtue, for Spinoza, 'is what *true religion* and *our eternal salvation and happiness* really consist in'.[14] Similarly, in the *Ethics*, Spinoza concludes the work as a whole with the proposition, 'Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself; nor do we enjoy it because we restrain our lusts; on the contrary, because we enjoy it, we are able to restrain them'.[15] But does this mean that Spinoza denied the immortality of the soul, 'as the Epicureans did'? He does not do so in the *Short Treatise* (from the principles of which, he claims, 'we can see clearly the origin of clear knowledge, and the immortality of the soul').[16] Does he deny this dogma in the *Ethics*?[17]

For Leibniz, the meaning of Spinoza's doctrine was more worrying than its logic. He finds a certain banality in the claim that something of the mind is eternal simply because the essence of the body is mirrored in the attribute of thought by an eternal essence of the mind. This eternal essence pertaining to the human mind has no more claim to existence than the abstract idea of, say, a sphere, itself a mere possibility until materially instantiated. After quoting (5p23dem), in which Spinoza

---

[12] Ibid. pp. 293-4, note 'e', emphasis added.

[13] Ibid. (emphasis added).

[14] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, pp. 128-9, emphasis added.

[15] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p42.

[16] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 156.

[17] In Chapter 2, I will address the relationship between the 'immortality of the soul', as it is presented in the *Short Treatise*, and the 'eternity of the mind', as it is presented in the *Ethics*.

reasons that '[t]his idea, which expresses the essence of the body under a species of eternity, is a mode of thought which pertains to the essence of the mind and is necessarily eternal', Leibniz complains: 'All this is illusory. This idea is like the figure of the sphere whose eternity does not favour existence, since it is only the possibility of an ideal sphere.'[18] He accuses Spinoza of talking about 'blessedness and the reform of our mind, as if these figures or abstract ideas could be made better'.[19] But, as Mogens Lærke has pointed out, Leibniz's criticism fails to take into account the two distinct 'levels' involved in Spinoza's account of the eternity of the mind.[20] While it is true that Spinoza opens his account at (5p23) by crediting the human mind with, as Lærke puts it, a certain '*aspect absolu*', owing to its essence being somehow timelessly 'encoded' in God's attributes, he goes on to elaborate a specifically human form of eternity in the subsequent passage. What Moreau calls the *'perspective différentielle*' of eternity is indeed ethical, since it depends on the extent to which an individual enjoys 'cognition of the third kind [*cognitio tertii generis*]' and the extent to which he or she has achieved some degree of 'improvement [*emendatio*]'. Therefore, as Lærke points out, '[i]f Leibniz does not see how the Spinozist conception of the mind's eternity can induce improvement, it is because he reduces it to the absolute aspect [*aspect absolu*] alone'.[21]

Elsewhere, Leibniz chastised Spinoza's eschatology for veering too closely towards a general heresy that had come to be associated with the twelfth-century Andalusian polymath Averroës, whose teachings were officially condemned by the Bishop of Paris in 1277.[22] Leibniz explains this tendency in a letter to Michael Hansch:

---

[18] Gottfried W. von Leibniz, *Remarques critiques de Leibniz, d'apres le manuscrit original, de la bibliothèque royale de hanovre*, in *Réfutation inédite de Spinoza par Leibniz*, ed. Louis A. Foucher de Careil (Paris: Ladrange, 1854), p. 57, translation my own. Quoted in Mogens Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza: la genèse d'une opposition complexe* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008), p. 908.

[19] Gottfried W. von Leibniz, *Opuscules et fragments inédits*, ed. Louis Couturat (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1961), p. 344, translation my own. Quoted in Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, p. 909.

[20] Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, p. 912. Pierre-François Moreau has highlighted the importance of keeping these distinct 'levels' in view when reading the passage beginning at (5p20s). From 'the first perspective [*première perspective*]', the 'reasons we are eternal are not applicable to human beings alone', but 'Spinoza says "we" or "human beings" when speaking of the feeling of eternity', which suggests a 'second perspective', or more precisely a 'differential perspective [*perpective différentielle*]'. Pierre-François Moreau, *Spinoza: L'expérience et l'éternité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Frane, 1994), p. 540.

[21] Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, p. 912.

[22] On March 7, 1277, the Bishop of Paris, Étienne Tempier, consolidated his earlier attempt of 1270 to stifle a growing popularity among University of Paris *magistri* of unorthodox philosophical and theological ideas perceived to be of Aristotelian and other Greco-Arabic origins, with a further condemnation of 219 '*errores*', among which was '(117) *quod intellectus est unus numero omnium, licet enim separetur a corpore hoc, non tamen ab omni* [the intellect of all men is numerically one, for even if it is

> Spinoza tends toward the same view. For him there is one substance, God. Creatures are his modifications, like figures in wax, continually arising and perishing through motion. So for him, just as for Almeric, the soul does not survive except through its ideal being in God, where it was from all eternity.[23]

Continued existence in such an impersonal form, with any trace of individuation melting away in the single undifferentiated mind of God, struck Leibniz as no less pernicious than the crude materialist or Epicurean denial of continued existence *tout court*. The idea that an Averroist fate for the soul could amount to anything more than this, he dismissed as intellectually and spiritually dishonest:

> They are false mystics, who deny individuality and action to the mind of the blessed, as if our highest perfection consisted in a kind of passive state. Blessedness of the soul does indeed consist in union with God, but we must not think that the soul is absorbed in God, having lost its individuality and activity, which alone constitute its distinct substance, for this would be an evil enthusiasm, an undesirable deification.[24]

This kind of Averroist reading would continue to appeal to critics, and indeed still thrives in the secondary literature today.[25] I will return to some recent examples below, but first I must turn to the intervening perception of Spinoza, which long prevailed, as the iconoclastic enemy of religion *par excellence*.

---

separated from a given body, it is not however separated from all]'. *La condamnation parisienne de 1277*, ed. David Piché (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, 1999), p. 88, translation my own. Predating the broader connotations that it subsequently acquired, the term 'Averroism' in the thirteenth century referred principally to this doctrine of mono-psychism, owing mainly to Aquinas' intervention of 1270, *De unitate intellectus contra averroistas*. Ibid. p. 166, note 1.

[23] Leibniz to Michael Gottlieb Hansch, 25 July 1707, in *G.W. Leibniz, Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. Leroy E. Loemker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 967. Quoted in Marc Bobro, 'Prudence and the Concern to Survive in Leibniz's Doctrine of Immortality', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 15, no. 3 (1998), p. 308.

[24] Ibid. p. 966.

[25] Rousseau, for example, would write in a note on a manuscript of *Julie* that 'those who in following Spinoza hold that at the death of a person his soul is resolved in the great soul of the world are saying nothing that makes sense'. Jean-Jacque Rousseau, *Émile, ou de l'Éducation*, ed. Maurice Masson (Fribourg: Librairie de l'Université, 1914), p. 209, note 2. Quoted in Walter Eckstein, 'Rousseau and Spinoza: Their Political Theories and Their Conception of Ethical Freedom', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 5, no. 3 (1944), p. 267.

The 'most impious atheist' becomes 'drunk with God'

Through much of the eighteenth century, Spinoza's reputation among European thinkers was that of an audacious atheist who had launched a bitter and scathing attack on religion. For many, this made him an enemy of the existing moral and social order that religion was thought to uphold, while in more radical circles, the biographical accounts of Spinoza's own virtuous character only served to demonstrate that the cultivation of virtue and moral decency need not depend on any subscription to orthodox religious principles.[26] However, both sections of the Enlightenment intelligentsia, the radical wing no less than their more conservative counterparts, shared the common assumption that Spinoza did indeed represent a hostile attempt to dismantle religion's credibility and doctrinal tenets, including the immortality of the soul and the theology of divine reward and punishment. This was not surprising, in view of the initial wave of fierce condemnation and controversy which Spinoza left in his wake in the last decades of the seventeenth century.

It was therefore only natural for commentators, both sympathetic and critical, to ascribe to Spinoza a rejection of religion's eschatological pretensions. Hence the conclusion reached by the Lutheran Minister John Colerus who, while staying in the house in which Spinoza had lived in The Hague, developed something of a curiosity for the notorious former resident and set out to compose one of the earliest biographies:

> Thus [Spinoza] owns indeed, that God is the General Cause of all things... In like manner, everything that happens in the World, Good or Evil, Virtue or Vice, Sin or Good Works, does necessarily proceed from him; and consequently there ought to be no Judgement, no Punishment, no Resurrection, no Salvation, no Damnation. For if it were so, that imaginary God wou'd Punish and Reward his own work... And therefore Mr. Burmanus,

[26] See, for example, Pierre Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, trans. Robert Bartlett (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) p. 181: '[A]theists are very much capable of performing all the moral actions we admire in paganism. This is what I say in response to all the examples of the pagans' virtue that one can adduce for me… As a result… they were no more likely to be virtuous than are atheists.' Later in the same text, Bayle recounts the noble calm with which Spinoza met his final rest: 'But what more could one do than what Spinoza did shortly before dying? …He was the greatest atheist there ever was and who was so infatuated with certain principles of philosophy that… he went into retirement, renouncing all that may be called the pleasures and vanities of the world… Sensing that he was near his end, he had his landlady come and begged her to prevent any minister from coming to see him in that condition. His reason was, as is known from one of his friends, that he wished to die without a dispute and that he feared falling into some weakness of the understanding which would make him say something that could be used against his principles.' Ibid. pp. 226-7.

> a Reformed Minister, at Enkhuysen calls Spinosa, with great Reason, the most impious Atheist that ever liv'd upon the Face of the Earth.[27]

This widely held opinion of Spinoza's overall stance would not be reconsidered on any particularly grand scale until the public controversies that erupted in Germany towards the *fin de siècle*. The 'Pantheism Controversy [*Pantheismusstreit*]' of the 1780's, which centred on Friedrich Jacobi's allegations that the celebrated poet and playwright Ephraim Lessing had been a follower of Spinoza, grossly slanderous in view of the erstwhile reputation just recounted, captured the attention and interest of the learned world with all the intrigue of a good scandal.[28] When Moses Mendelssohn rose to the defence of his dear departed friend, the ensuing debate over Lessing's alleged Spinozism, the very nature of 'Spinozism', and the wider implications for the *Aufkläring* more generally shook the intellectual scene 'like a thunderbolt out of the blue [*wie ein Donnerschlag vom blauer Himmel*]', as Hegel put it.[29] But as a consequence of all this renewed interest in Spinoza's thought, there emerged in the public realm some radical new assessments of its philosophical - and theological - import. The religiosity that Lessing had found, and Mendelssohn had defended (albeit by first 'purifying' it), in Spinoza's thought now seemed a credible assessment, helped still further by the revelation that Goethe and (indeed from an earlier date and with more philosophical rigour) Herder too had arrived at a more religious estimation of the notorious philosopher.[30] Having reached this view already, Herder protested to Jacobi:

---

[27] John Colerus, *The Life of Benedict de Spinosa* (London: D.L., 1706), p. 70. Frans Burman ('Burmanus'), perhaps better known for his transcription of a conversation he had had with Descartes in 1648, when he was still twenty, later became Professor of Theology at Utrecht in 1664, and subsequently joined the fierce outcry against Spinoza and his philosophy.

[28] Upon learning of Mendelssohn's intentions to publish a tribute to Lessing's life and character, Jacobi felt compelled to inform him of conversations he had had with the celebrated poet in which the latter had revealed his assent to Spinoza's philosophy. Offended by the impertinence of this insinuation, Mendelssohn brushed the allegations aside, but this only served to provoke Jacobi into eventually publishing all of the incriminating letters and transcripts. Friedrich Jacobi, *Ueber die Lehre von Spinoza in Briefen an Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (Breslau: Gottlieb Löwe, 1785). Preparing for this danger all along, Mendelssohn's exoneration of Lessing in *Morning Hours* appeared almost simultaneously. *Morning Hours: Lectures on God's Existence*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom and Corey Dyck (Dordrecht: Springer Verlag, 2011). For an account of this fascinating episode of intellectual history, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 44 and *passim*.

[29] G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke*, vol. XX (Frankfurt: Surhkamp Verlag, 1980), pp. 316-7. Quoted in Beiser, *Fate of Reason*, p. 46.

[30] Goethe wrote to Jacobi at the height of the controversy, saying that if 'others scold Spinoza for being an atheist, I should like to name him as *theissimum*, indeed, *christianissimum*'. Heinrich Scholz, *Die Hauptschriften zum Pantheismus Streit zwischen Jacobi und Mendelssohn* (Berlin: Reuther and Reichard, 1916), cviii. Herder, similarly, reversed the old stereotype: 'I thought I should find a brazen atheist and I find almost a metaphysical and moral enthusiast.' J. G. von Herder, *God: Some Conversations*, ed. and trans.

> The *proton pseudos*, dear Jacobi, in your and every anti-Spinozist system is that God, as the great *ens entium*, the cause that is eternally active in all phenomena, is a zero, an abstract concept in the way we form our idea of Him. But according to Spinoza He is not this, but the most real and active One, who alone says to Himself: "I am that I am, and shall be in all the changes in my phenomenal appearance"… And so the philosopher of true being does not begin from the proposition, *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, but from the eternal proposition *Quidquid est, illud est*.[31]

The nineteenth century would therefore be open to an entirely novel depiction of Spinoza. A philosophy that had long been reviled for its heresy now became, as the poet Heinrich Heine put it, 'the unofficial religion of Germany [*das öffentliche Geheimniß in Deutschland*]', referring to the growing enthusiasm for a heavily idealistic and theological appropriation of Spinoza's single-substance metaphysics in the philosophy of Schelling, Hegel and others.[32] Spinoza was now known as a man 'drunk with God [*gottbetrunkener*]'.[33] Interestingly, the eschatology propounded by the ministers of this new 'unofficial religion of Germany' carried distinct echoes of what Spinoza had attempted to convey in *Ethics* V. Suggesting that Hegel's view may bear 'a significant relation to Spinoza's reflection on the mystical state in *Ethics* BK 5', Cyril O'Regan adds that both consist in '(1) a dismantling of the absoluteness of the distinction between this life and the next life… and (2) a revisionist and critical understanding of the durational representation of immortality'.[34] The subversion of a traditional theological distinction between this life and the next, involved in something that Charles Dodd has called 'realised eschatology', is in fact the same 'doctrine' that Bayle long ago suggested 'Spinoza would have put forth if he had dared to dogmatise publicly'.[35] As pointed out above, and as will be explored in

---

Frederick H. Burkhardt (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1940), p. 430. Quoted in David Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe* (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1984), p. 106.

[31] Herder to Jacobi, 6 February 1784, *Briefe. Gesamtausgabe 1763-1803* (Weimar: Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, 1977), pp. 28-9. Quoted in Bell, *Spinoza in Germany*, p. 109.

[32] Heinrich Heine, *Werke*, vol. VIII (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1981), p. 175. Quoted in Beiser, *Fate of Reason*, p. 45. Hegel mused lyrically on the debt he owed to his spiritual forerunner: '[T]o be a follower of Spinoza is the essential commencement of all Philosophy… the soul must commence by bathing in this ether of the One Substance, in which all that man has held as true has disappeared; this negation of all that is particular, to which every philosopher must have come, is the liberation of the mind and its absolute function.' G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. III, E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson trans. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968) pp. 257-8.

[33] 'Spinotza ist ein gottbetrunkener Mensch'. Novalis, *Schriften*, ed. Richard Samuel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960), p. 651.

[34] Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) p. 255.

[35] Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, p.23; Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, p. 295.

subsequent chapters, this is indeed an important feature of Spinoza's eschatological position.

This radical reappraisal of Spinoza's thought, though originating in Germany, was not of course confined to that region but rippled outwards to the rest of Europe. As Victor Delbos observed, looking back on the century, it is 'certainly under the influence of German ideas that Spinozism has been more directly studied and more favourably received in France'.[36] But any additional enthusiasm for the individual's subsumption into an all-consuming 'absolute' would struggle to translate in a land where individualist values had only recently helped to fuel a violent and traumatic revolution.[37] Nonetheless, Victor Cousin could now correct a mistaken accusation: 'Far from being an atheist, as he has been accused, Spinoza has such a sentiment of God that he has lost a sentiment of the human'.[38] But this is to replace one mistake with its inverse, for Spinoza had not lost sight of the human any more than the divine. Indeed, the two for him are so closely linked that 'God, in so far as he loves himself, loves mankind, and, consequently... the love of God towards men and the mind's intellectual love towards God are one and the same'.[39]

In England, the point in Spinoza's thought at which the human and the divine converge was not lost on the minister and theologian John Hunt, who echoed the new appraisal emanating from the continent: 'Spinoza's object was… to prove that religion is the highest reason.'[40] Favouring clerical eloquence over technical rigour, he offered his take on the eternity of the mind:

> Starting with the existence of God… [Spinoza] went on to demonstrate the immortality of the soul… From eternal life [the soul] falls into the darkness of the terrestrial state. Detached in some way from the bosom of God it is exiled into nature… it perceives things only in their temporal and changing aspect, and with difficulty seizes the eternal bond which binds the entire universe and itself to God. It does, however, seize it, and by a lofty effort, surpassing the weight of the corporeal chain, it finds again the infinite good which it had lost. The human soul is thus immortal… Reason, which enables us to perceive

---

[36] Victor Delbos, *Le problème moral dans la philosophie de Spinoza et dans l'histoire du Spinozisme* (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Germer Baillière et C[ie], 1893), p. 491, translation my own.

[37] Delbos mentions certain 'profound tendencies of the French mind… disposed to affirm that individuality constitutes a completely sufficient form of existence, to make of the person an end in itself'. Ibid. p. 496, translation my own.

[38] Victor Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques*, vol. II (Paris: Ladrange, 1826), p. 164, translation my own. Quoted in Delbos, *Le problème morale*, p. 492.

[39] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p36c.

[40] John Hunt, *An Essay on Pantheism* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1866), p. 235. Reproduced with notes in W. Boucher ed., *Spinoza: Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Discussions*, vol. III (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1999), pp. 222-38.

> things under the form of eternity, alone subsists. "The human soul cannot entirely perish with the body. There remains something of it which is eternal."[41]

A very English Spinoza renaissance

Towards the close of the century, England became a veritable hotbed of Spinoza scholarship, with the publication of sophisticated and illuminating book-length studies by Frederick Pollock, James Martineau and John Caird.[42] Referring to the doctrine of the eternity of the mind as 'the singular and difficult part of Spinoza's exposition', Pollock took it to concern that which 'is known as part of the necessary order of nature', which, being 'the *idea* of a certain state of its own body', must give the mind also 'consciousness or knowledge of itself which exactly corresponds to its knowledge of the body,' which is, however, 'not a persistence in time after the dissolution of the body, for [eternity] is not commensurable with time at all'.[43] This 'consciousness or knowledge' invokes a 'state or quality of perfection called the *intellectual love of God*'.[44] Martineau took this passage in the *Ethics* to straddle 'the boundary between the ethical and the hyper-ethical'.[45] Whereas Pollock was willing to allow that the eternal part of the mind is 'part of the infinite intellect, but is not lost in it', Martineau found this unwillingness to attribute to Spinoza an impersonal eternity - 'like a telescope, outside us all, yet available to all' - to stem from a temptation to import too strong a 'modern conception of *personality*' into the doctrine and in doing so 'overstrain its meaning'.[46] For Caird, clearly under the influence of Hegel, the problem lies not in the preservation of individuality or personhood, but in Spinoza's unresolved abstraction of the eternal viewpoint from the lived and 'imagined' world of time and change. He recommends, by way of completing Spinoza's eschatological picture, a revalorisation of the 'lower' phase of time and imagination:

---

[41] Ibid.

[42] Pollock, *Spinoza*; James Martineau, *A Study of Spinoza* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1882); Caird, *Spinoza*.

[43] Pollock, *Spinoza*, p. 288.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Martineau, *Study of Spinoza*, p. 289.

[46] Pollock, p. 289; Martineau, pp. 297-8.

> The relation of imagination to reason is simply the relation, in modern language, of consciousness to self-consciousness… It is not by brooding on itself in some pure, supersensuous sphere of untroubled spirituality, but by going forth into a world that, in the first instance, is outside of and foreign to itself… that self-conscious intelligence ceases to be a lifeless abstraction, and becomes a concrete reality… The eternal life is not that which abstracts from the temporal, but that which contains while it annuls it.[47]

The twentieth century saw still more attempts to decipher Spinoza's doctrine of the eternity of the mind. Harold Joachim, one of Francis H. Bradley's students at Oxford, followed in the footsteps of the previous generation by interpreting Spinoza idealistically, though, unlike Martineau, he was willing to credit the eternal part of the mind with 'an individuality, which has universal, necessary and permanent being in its oneness with God, but is yet concrete and uniquely characterised', and, unlike Caird, without taking this to mean that 'we are lost in the abstract universality of the objects of science,' but rather that we 'have come to a rich and real personality'.[48] In 1934, Wolfson's monumental study of the intellectual ancestry informing Spinoza's philosophy appeared.[49] As a result of his archaeological excavation, he concluded that 'Spinoza's conception of the immortality of the soul, in its main outline, does not go beyond that of any rationalist theology', such as that of Maimonides or Gersonides, for whom 'immortality is to be attributed only to the rational part of the soul', and 'the bliss and happiness of the immortal souls consist in the delight they take in the knowledge of the essence of God'.[50] For Wolfson, then, Spinoza's eschatology allows a 'personal' and 'individual' immortality:

> Still, though all souls are immortal, and all of them are united with God, there exist certain differences between the individual souls which remain after death. They do not all merge in one universal soul. Immortality is in a certain sense personal and individual.[51]

Stuart Hampshire deemed it incorrect to draw out so strong an implication as the continued existence of a distinct individual, subscribing instead to the Averroist reading previously favoured by Leibniz and Martineau:

> The possible eternity of the human mind cannot therefore be intended by Spinoza to mean that I literally survive, as a distinguishable individual, in so far

---

[47] Caird, pp. 295-6.

[48] Harold H. Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1901) pp. 302-3.

[49] Wolfson, *Philosophy of Spinoza*, 2 vols.

[50] Ibid. pp. 322, 291, 310.

[51] Ibid. p. 318.

> as I attain genuine knowledge; for in so far as I do attain genuine knowledge, my individuality as a particular thing disappears and my mind becomes so far united with God or Nature conceived under the attribute of thought… In our intellectual life, at the more successful moments of completely disinterested, logical thought, we have these glimpses of the possibility of living, not as finite and perishing modes of Nature, but identified or "united" with God or Nature as a whole.[52]

Hampshire takes this to be 'playing the immortal as far as is possible for us', as Aristotle put it. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the 'genuine double-aspect' of Spinoza's thought, which has made him seem to some 'a pantheist who interprets every natural phenomenon as a revelation of an immanent but impersonal God', but equally 'to others… a harsh materialist and determinist who denies all significance to morality and religion'.[53] But in certain subsequent engagements with Spinoza's philosophy, this latter aspect would partially eclipse the former. Edwin Curley's ingenious translation of Spinoza's key notions into the more contemporary lexicon of logical and scientific analysis helped to make an antiquated and unfamiliar metaphysical language more accessible to contemporary readers. But in presenting Spinoza as having at bottom constructed 'a unified science of extended objects', which he has called an essentially 'materialistic program', he invited the charge from others of having offered a 'reductive' exposition of Spinoza's true position.[54] In recent work, he has acknowledged, but not disputed, this charge.[55] But whatever the answer to this more meta-interpretative question, Curley, it will become clear, has made many invaluable contributions to the task of untangling Spinoza's doctrine of the eternity of the mind.

---

[52] Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza*, London: Penguin, 1951, p. 175.

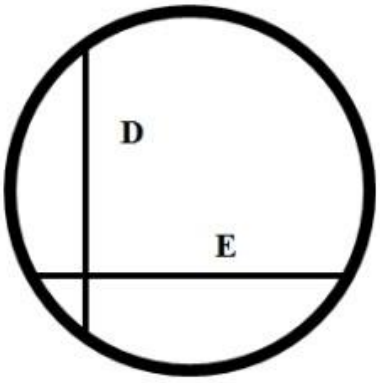
[53] Ibid. p. 27.

[54] Edwin Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation* (Harvard: Cambridge University Press, 1969) p. 119; Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's* Ethics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) p. 78.

[55] Ibid. p. 48, note 43.

Recent perspectives

Drawing on the importance of (2p8) for the demonstration of (5p23), in which it is cited, Curley consults Spinoza's analogy of the infinitely many, 'durationally' non-existent, rectangles that are nonetheless implicit in any given circle, which is taken to illustrate the distinction between the two kinds of existence - 'durational' and 'eternal' - implicated in the doctrine of the eternity of the mind.



> [N]one of [the rectangles] can be said to exist except insofar as the circle exists, nor also can the idea of any of these rectangles be said to exist except insofar as it is comprehended in the idea of the circle. Now of these infinitely many [rectangles] let two only, viz. [those formed from the segments of lines] D and E, exist. Of course their ideas also exist now, not only insofar as they are only comprehended in the idea of the circle, but also insofar as they involve the existence of those rectangles.[56]

Curley interprets the significance of the analogy as follows:

> Suppose that we understand by the "infinite idea of God" the laws of nature. Just as the circle defines a class of possible rectangles, so the laws of nature define classes of possible entities... Whether or not a particular body satisfying the conditions [circumscribed by the laws of nature] exists will, of course, depend on considerations extraneous to scientific theory, just as the actual existence of one of the infinitely many rectangles contained implicitly in the circle will depend on considerations extraneous to geometry.[57]

Curley's suggestion, therefore, is that following (and also, strictly speaking, before) the actual, durational, existence of the body, there will be (and was) a kind of existence enjoyed by both the essence of the body and the essence of the mind, insofar as these are both *possible*, given the eternally unchanging laws of nature. He admits, however, that framing this kind of existence in terms of 'possibility' conflicts

[56] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p8s.

[57] Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, p. 141.

with what Spinoza himself says, both, we might add, about the reality of contingency more generally, and about this kind of existence in particular, which he clearly regarded as actual:

> We conceive things as *actual* in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature.[58]

But more problematic for Curley's suggestion, as he again confesses, is that 'Spinoza speaks only of a *part* of the mind as being eternal', and 'if he were thinking of the ideas of things as being contained in the idea of God in the manner that I have suggested, then there would be no reason for him to state his doctrine in this limited way'.[59] In any case, Curley's reading convinces him that the kind of existence involved in the eternity of the mind must exclude any temporal properties, such as 'existing *after the body dies*'.[60] For Curley, this means that when Spinoza says things like 'it is time now to pass to those things which pertain to the mind's duration without relation to the body', he is 'trying to accommodate popular views within his system in a way the system will not really allow'.[61] He concludes: 'Spinoza does not have a doctrine of personal immortality... Whatever the doctrine of the eternity of the mind does mean, it does not mean that *I* can entertain any hope of immortality.'[62]

Seeking to restore balance to Spinoza's 'genuine double-aspect', Errol Harris has offered what, in the subtitle to his commentary, *Salvation from Despair*, he calls a *Reappraisal of Spinoza's Philosophy*.[63] Against the temptation to group Spinoza together with those who, during 'the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, [and] in the service of a strictly rational analysis, conceived the world as a lifeless machine', Harris countered that Spinoza's brand of rationalism is in fact rich enough to invoke a 'constructive and prescriptive' phase, among the objectives of which is that 'everybody… enjoy satisfaction and peace of mind… what he called "salvation"'.[64] Turning to Spinoza's 'doctrine of human immortality, which is, in many ways', he admits, 'the most puzzling and controversial of his entire system', he takes the

---

[58] Spinoza, 5p29s, emphasis added.

[59] Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, pp. 142-3.

[60] Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 85.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid. pp. 85-6.

[63] Harris, *Salvation from Despair.*

[64] Ibid. pp. 11-2.

solution to lie in the distinctive nature of the human mind.[65] 'Man's immortality' differs from that of 'a fish' or 'a piece of granite', without simply dissolving into 'a set of eternal truths identical for all minds as for God's and with as little personal idiosyncrasy', he suggests, because human thought is special in being 'self-conscious and self-illuminating'.[66] Explaining why this should make the crucial difference, he echoes the dialectical story previously recounted by Caird:

> An entity's idea or consciousness of itself must and can only be its awareness of itself in distinction from something else… Consciousness, therefore, is always not merely self-consciousness (*idea ideæ*) but is also self-transcendent, and tends to comprehension of some whole to which its object belongs... All ideas are on the one hand part of the psychical stream which is the counterpart of the body, yet, on the other hand, all consciousness is in some degree transcendent of its immediate object in time and space; and to the extent that it is not limited, as its body (*qua* finite mode of Extension) is limited, it participates (if we may, like Plato, use a term which is not wholly appropriate) in eternity.[67]

Around the same time, Martha Kneale applied the latest tools of logical analysis to the concepts of 'eternity', 'eternal object' and 'sempiternity', and used her findings to evaluate Spinoza's position.[68] Like her father, William Kneale, she concluded that 'timelessness as the *totul simul* of time is a self-contradictory notion', and that the only viable content it could have would have to amount to some kind of notion of necessity.[69] Since that which exists necessarily must exist at all times, Kneale infers that this will also be equivalent to 'sempiternity', or existence 'at all moments of time'.[70] Turning to the question of the eternity of the mind in the *Ethics*, Kneale acknowledges 'those passages in which Spinoza draws a sharp line between duration and eternity', but points out that this cannot accommodate her translation of eternity into necessity and, *inter alia*, sempiternity. Accordingly, Kneale accounts for 'those passages' that draw a sharp distinction between eternity and duration by postulating that Spinoza 'began with a Platonic view of eternity as timelessness sharply separated from duration', a 'way of thinking [that] persists into the *Ethics*… but by

---

[65] Ibid. p. 227.

[66] Ibid. pp. 234-7.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Martha Kneale, 'Eternity and Sempiternity', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 69 (1968), pp. 223-38. Reprinted in Marjorie Grene ed., *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Anchor Press, 1973), pp. 227-40.

[69] Ibid. p. 227. See, also, William Kneale, 'Time and Eternity in Theology', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 61 (1960), pp. 87-108.

[70] Kneale, 'Eternity and Sempiternity', p. 223.

the time he came to write Part V… [he] was thinking in a more Aristotelian way' by equating eternity with sempiternity.[71] The upshot, Kneale concludes, is that Spinoza's eschatology entails 'two doctrines of extreme unorthodoxy', i.e. the pre-existence (as well as the post-existence) of the human soul and the doctrine of universal salvation, and this must be why he had 'shrunk from expressing it with full openness', for '*pace* Pollock, Spinoza did wish to be read and to secure a hearing'.[72] Kneale's analysis, historical conjecture and conclusions will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but here it may suffice to point out that, contrary to the suggestion that Spinoza switched from a 'Platonic' to an 'Aristotelian' conception of eternity in *Ethics* V, he in fact reiterates the same strict opposition between eternity and duration within the critical passage itself: 'our mind, insofar as it involves the essence of the body under a species of eternity, is eternal, and… this existence it has cannot be defined by time *or* explained through duration'.[73]

Siding with Kneale on the question of which conception of eternity is at play in *Ethics* V, Alan Donagan has argued for the strongest reconstruction of Spinoza's doctrine to date in his confidently titled article on the topic.[74] Spinoza, he insists, must have 'intended his remark that eternity cannot have any relation to time to be understood as qualified', so that, although 'the eternal part of a man cannot, *sub specie æternitatis*, leave traces in his body, for leaving traces would be an event in time… it does not follow that the eternal part of a man may not be related to time by forming part of a human mind actually existing for a time'.[75] Drawing attention to Spinoza's distinction between a thing's 'formal essence', which includes no implication that the thing in question is actual, and that thing's 'actual essence', which, he suggests, is 'composite, and may be analysed into the idea of a formal essence, and the idea of other existents being such as not to prevent its existence', Donagan argued that the 'eternal part of a mind' is just this, i.e. 'the idea of the (formal) essence of its body'.[76] Less controversially, he noted that Spinoza's 'theory of the individuation of human minds' is such that human minds are 'individuated by bodies considered as their

[71] Ibid. p. 238.

[72] Ibid. p. 240.

[73] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p23s.

[74] Alan Donagan, 'Spinoza's Proof of Immortality', in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Grene, p. 241.

[75] Ibid. p. 247.

[76] Ibid. pp. 250-1.

objects or *ideata*'.[77] But, he suggests, this must apply equally to the eternal part of the mind, which, after all, is the idea of the essence of a particular human body. This 'confirms Wolfson's emphatic statement that [Spinoza] conceived immortality as "personal and individual"', and implies that 'eternal self-knowledge' is 'complete' in a way that 'durational self-knowledge' cannot be.[78]

> No wisdom, and no virtue that a man attains in this life will be taken away from him; but neither will anything that he does not attain be added to him.
>
> For this reason, I think Martha Kneale was mistaken in attributing to [Spinoza] the hideous hypothesis of universal salvation. It is true that he dismissed all doctrines of retributive punishment in the afterlife… But what is *beatitudo* for the good, because it involves understanding and love of God, and acquiescence in the course of nature, will be confusion and frustration for the wicked.[79]

In keeping with his fascinating study of Spinoza's 'second-order Marrano' characteristics, Yirmiyahu Yovel likens the special insight into human eschatology conveyed in the *Ethics* to that which had motivated the continued adherence of *converso* Jews in Inquisition Iberia to the Law of Moses, which for them was the 'secret key to true eternity'.[80] For both Spinoza and his forebears 'knew better than the multitude' where the true way to salvation lies.[81] Like 'Plato, and in a different way, Hegel', Yovel suggests, 'Spinoza can be seen also as secularising religion without giving up its absolute pathos, or as sacralising reason by giving it the supreme spiritual tasks that were wrongly attributed to religious mysticism'.[82] But he warns against conflating the kind of salvation offered by Spinoza with any kind of immortality or afterlife. The 'cognitive basis of salvation in Spinoza… is an occurrence within this life and world, as eternity penetrates my actual existence and transforms its quality and direction', so it is therefore 'not in immortality that metaphysical salvation consists, but in the realisation of eternity within time'.[83] Though correct to recognise that Spinoza's account is a form of 'realised eschatology', as Bayle had discovered, Yovel seems to take it for granted that the only

---

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid. p. 252, p. 257.

[79] Ibid. pp. 257-8.

[80] Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason*, vol. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 36-7.

[81] Ibid. p. 36.

[82] Ibid. pp. 37-8.

[83] Ibid. p. 170.

valid understanding of the term 'immortality' would have to amount to 'sempiternity'.[84] But this is perhaps the very crux of the debate. Other commentators, such as Harris, have not thought it inappropriate to describe that which Yovel (rightly) calls an 'immanent' form of human salvation as a kind of 'immortality'.

At the culmination of his comprehensive exploration of the interplay between eternity and experience in Spinoza's philosophy, Moreau hoped to set the record straight regarding the doctrine of the eternity of the mind.[85] Above all, he joins Yovel in insisting that Spinoza 'clearly distinguished between the mind's eternity and immortality', and, consequently, it can only 'do violence to the text to read in the foreground a doctrine of the immortality of the soul'.[86] Highlighting Spinoza's criticism of 'the common opinion of men', which confuses a genuine awareness of the eternity of their mind with duration and attributes to it the faculties of memory and imagination 'which they believe remain after death', Moreau argues that a doctrine devoid of these popular connotations 'cannot be assimilated to the traditional religious conception', and so cannot very well be called a doctrine of 'immortality'.[87] Having made this terminological interdiction, however, he then somewhat weakens his position, adding that nevertheless this 'does not exclude a certain form of immortality in the system - that which would correspond to a survival of the intellect without the imagination'.[88]

It is true that a 'traditional religious conception' of immortality may be incompatible with such a stripped down form of mental existence, but perhaps less traditional conceptions, acceptable even to some who might still subscribe to the Abrahamic faiths, might accommodate such a thing. Clearly, Donagan thought it justifiable to apply the language of 'immortality' to Spinoza's doctrine because, on his reading, the eternal part of the mind, *qua* virtuous expression of a person's own individual essence, is that which most intrinsically belongs to a person. Although Spinoza at one point seemed to suggest - and has been said to anticipate Locke's celebrated theory - that the more temporal aspects of a person's psychology and, in particular, a person's memories, are the *sine qua non* of continued personal identity,

[84] Ibid. p. 169.

[85] Moreau, *Spinoza.*

[86] Ibid. p. 535, translation my own.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

the text is actually far from decisive, and in fact in tension with a clear tendency in Spinoza's thought towards a stronger valorisation of the more rational (and, in practice, virtuous) aspects of a person's identity.[89] But that these questions can even be raised, and that their answers might depend on further reconstructive arguments, may suggest that Moreau's intervention has not settled the question once and for all.

In support of a reading that takes Spinoza to be clearly distinguishing between the eternity of the mind and the immortality of the soul, one might argue that, whereas the former is proven philosophically and enjoys an independent, conceptual strength, the latter is just another dogma of the 'universal faith [*fides catholica*]' described in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, that is, not necessarily true but promoted in the interests of maintaining moral and social order. It may seem that Spinoza is bestowing such a status on this particular dogma too:

> If men had not this hope and fear, but believed that the mind perishes with the body, and that no hope of prolonged life remains for the wretches who are broken down with the burden of piety, they would return to their own inclinations, controlling everything in accordance with their lusts, and desiring to obey fortune rather than themselves.[90]

Moreau highlights a corresponding passage in the preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise*, concerning 'the prejudiced beliefs that originate from the fact that the common people [are] prone to superstition and prizing the legacy of time above eternity itself'.[91] But again, this is, strictly speaking, neutral with respect to Spinoza's conception of immortality. Indeed, as Spinoza points out in the *Ethics*, this is clearly 'immortality [*immortalitas*]' as it is imagined by the 'multitude [*multitudo*]':

> If we attend to the common opinion of men, we shall see that they are indeed conscious of the eternity of their Mind, but that they confuse it with duration, and attribute it to the imagination, *or* memory, which they believe remains after death.[92]

The proposition to which the first of these passages forms part of the scholium is concerned with the importance of 'all the things we have shown' prior to the eternity of the mind, which Spinoza introduces with a *counterfactual* clause, '[e]ven if we did

---

[89] The text in question is that of the 'Spanish Poet' passage: 'Sometimes a man undergoes such changes that I should hardly have said he was the same man. I have heard stories, for example, of a Spanish Poet who suffered an illness; though he recovered, he was left so oblivious to his past life that he did not believe the tales and tragedies he had written were his own.' Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p39s.

[90] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p41s.

[91] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, Preface, p. 54; Moreau, *Spinoza*, p. 540.

[92] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p34s.

not know that our Mind is eternal...'[93] Clearly, then, Spinoza *does* take himself to know that the mind is eternal. Moreover, no sooner does he mention the term 'eternal [*æternam*]' than he follows it with the term 'immortal [*immortalem*]', as though the latter were an added gloss on the former. As for the 'universal faith' described in the *Treatise*, there is no evidence to suggest that the dogma of immortality, in particular, should be included among its prescribed beliefs. In fact, neither the term 'immortality [*immortalitas*]', nor any of its cognates, appears in the text.

This whirlwind survey of engagements with Spinoza's eschatology would surely be incomplete were it not to include the recent contributions from Steven Nadler. Expressing agreement with Curley, Yovel and Moreau, he is emphatic that 'Spinoza *did*, without question, deny the personal immortality of the soul'.[94] However, his reasons for taking this view differ from those cited by these other critics. For Nadler's interpretation instead resembles that which Leibniz had first originated, and Martineau and Hampshire had subsequently developed. In other words, Nadler attributes to Spinoza the 'Averroist heresy' of conceiving the soul's post-mortem destiny as one of merging into a universal soul and in the process losing any individuating characteristics it might have had during its embodied existence:

> My suggestion is that for Spinoza, after a person's death, what remains of the mind eternally - the adequate ideas, along with the idea of the essence of the body - all disperses and reverts back to the infinite intellect of God (the attribute of Thought), since they are just God's knowledge of things.[95]

Aside from objections to this kind of reading already implicit in the competing readings above, it might also be ventured that Nadler proceeds, like Yovel and Moreau, from a presupposed conception of 'immortality', which happens to be at variance with his interpretation of Spinoza's notion of the eternity of the mind. By way of supplying some of Nadler's wider interpretative commitments, it might also be worth noting that he makes no secret of his alliance with the early critics who charged Spinoza with heresy and irreligious mischief, arguing that his language only 'seems deeply religious', but can in fact convey no more than a 'naturalist and rationalist project', since, in the final analysis, 'Spinoza is an atheist'.[96] This constitutes, for Nadler, 'the strongest possible reason… for thinking that Spinoza

[93] Ibid. 5p41.

[94] Nadler, 'Eternity and Immortality', p. 228.

[95] Ibid. pp. 242-3.

[96] Steven Nadler, 'Spinoza the Atheist', *New Humanist*, 121, no. 2 (2006).

intended to deny the personal immortality of the soul: such a religiously charged doctrine goes against every grain of his philosophical persuasions'.[97]

However, whether or not Spinoza's discussion of the mind's eternity should be understood as an attempt to inoculate the idea of 'immortality' of any ethical or religious significance is perhaps the very *Gretchenfrage* with which we are confronted, and so should not be prejudged at the outset. To guard against this danger, I will conclude this survey of literature with some advice from Clare Carlisle:

> The question is... how the concept of immortality is transformed when it is thought through the Spinozistic lens. One possible response to this question, of course, is that whenever Spinoza uses religious terminology he does so in order to naturalise and secularise established beliefs. But... we should not assume that the transformation of meaning accomplished in Spinoza's deployment of traditional religious vocabulary is a reductive one. It may be that just as Spinoza uses - and thereby alters - existing philosophical concepts in order to articulate his alternative metaphysics, so his reinterpretations of theological ideas serve to communicate an alternative form of religiosity in terms that he could expect his readers to relate to.[98]

This policy may be taken further, so as not to assume from the outset any necessary incompatibility between 'naturalism', or 'secularism', on the one hand, and 'religiosity', on the other. It is hopefully the conceptual topography of these *grands mots*, as well as the more precise terms in play - 'immortality', 'eternity' and 'mind' - that will, with Spinozistic compass and quadrant, be charted in what follows.[99]

---

[97] Nadler, 'Eternity and Immortality', pp. 243-4. See also Nadler's broader study of Spinoza's eschatology set against the background of his expulsion from the Jewish community in Amsterdam. Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

[98] Clare Carlisle, 'Spinoza on Eternal Life', in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (2015), forthcoming.

[99] It is an interesting question, though somewhat orthogonal to the topic of this dissertation, as to whether it is precisely this penchant for 'innovation' to which Spinoza's critics, such as Leibniz, were so averse. See Mogens Lærke, 'The Problem of *Alloglossia*. Leibniz on Spinoza's Innovative Use of Philosophical Language', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 17, no. 5 (2009), pp. 939-53.

Within the surface of Time's fleeting river
Its wrinkled image lies, as then it lay
Immovably unquiet, and for ever
It trembles, but it cannot pass away.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Chapter 2

'Immortality of the Soul' vs. 'Eternity of the Mind'

A quick glance at the literature surveyed in the previous chapter shows that Spinoza's account of the eternity of the mind in *Ethics* V has often been thought to be a response to the religious dogma of the immortality of the soul. There are commentators, like Wolfson, who think that it is 'proper to retain the traditional vocabulary and speak of the immortality of the soul', indeed that 'the immortality of the soul, according to Spinoza, is personal and individual' (as opposed to an impersonal diffusion in a 'universal soul').[1] A recent advocate for this verdict on the meaning of the passage, Donagan has argued that 'immortality as [Spinoza] understood it preserves much of the substance of what plain men have hoped for', and that Wolfson was right to understand it as 'personal and individual'.[2] But there is no shortage of opposition to this view. Yovel, it was noted in the previous chapter, has ruled out the viability of such a notion in Spinoza's philosophy: 'How then is immortality possible [for Spinoza]? To answer in a word: it is not possible.'[3] He adds, the 'transcendent-religious idea of an afterlife, in which our existence will be modified in proportion to what we have done in this life, is foreign to him'.[4] Similarly, Moreau has warned of the 'violence [it does] to the text to read in the foreground a doctrine of the immortality of the soul'.[5] More recently, Steven Nadler has gone to great lengths to discredit any such 'immortality reading'. Joining Yovel

[1] Wolfson, *Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. II, p. 295. On the 'Averroist heresy', see Chapter 1, p. 23 (together with note 23).

[2] Donagan, 'Spinoza's Proof of Immortality', pp. 256, 252.

[3] Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, vol. I, p. 170.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Moreau, *Spinoza*, p. 535.

and Moreau, he insists that 'such a religiously charged doctrine goes against every grain of [Spinoza's] philosophical persuasions', and that to try to find such a doctrine in his writings is 'to deeply misunderstand Spinoza'.[6]

In this chapter, I will try to make room for a compromise between these opposing perspectives. On the one hand, I will argue that Yovel *et al* are right to insist that Spinoza rejected the traditional, transcendent conception of an afterlife. But, on the other hand, I will make a case for granting that Spinoza remained nonetheless deeply moved by the question of human mortality. The philosophical response that he gradually came to develop reflects his more general metaphysical project of replacing an opposition between 'this world' and 'a world beyond' with his own immanent framework, in that it too consists in replacing a theological opposition between 'this life' and 'the next' with his own immanently construed notion of eternal life. If Spinoza was willing to invest so many traditional philosophical and theological terms with new meaning, then why should the term 'immortality' be any different? As early as the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, he warned of the danger of misconstruing the nature of immortality: 'the Stoics heard, perhaps, the world *soul*, and also that the soul is immortal [*immortalis*], *which they only imagined confusedly*'.[7] If it is possible to be confused about immortality, then it is presumably also possible to be correct about it. Warning of the 'violence' it does to the text of the *Ethics* to find in it a doctrine of immortality because it differs (even radically so) from a 'traditional religious conception' is to refuse Spinoza the kind of innovation and reinterpretation in which he was otherwise engaged.[8] For in many ways his philosophy consists in a radical overhaul of existing paradigms. Granting Spinoza this latitude, it is possible to allow Wolfson *et al* no less of a concession than their counterparts. Admittedly, Spinoza 'could not have denied that the character of the immortality he offered to demonstrate differs from that promised by the saints and prophets'.[9] But nor, I think, did he regard his alternative as a superficial or

---

[6] Nadler, 'Eternity and Immortality', pp. 243-4. See, also, Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, pp. 84-6; James C. Morrison, 'Spinoza on the Self, Personal Identity, and Immortality', in *Spinoza: The Enduring Questions*, ed. Graeme Hunter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 31-47.

[7] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §74, emphasis added. Although this was once thought to be one of Spinoza's later works, it is now generally accepted to be among the earliest. Filippo Mignini has made a compelling case for thinking it the earliest of Spinoza's known works, earlier even than the *Short Treatise*. Filippo Mignini, 'Per la datazione e l'interpretazione del *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* di B. Spinoza', *La Cultura*, 17 (1979), pp. 87-160.

[8] But see Mogens Lærke, 'The Problem of *Alloglossia*. Leibniz on Spinoza's Innovative Use of Philosophical Language'.

[9] Donagan, 'Spinoza's Proof of Immortality', p. 256.

watered-down substitute. In tracing the evolution of Spinoza's eschatology from his earlier to his later works, I will aim to show that this problem continued to be of importance to him, and that the response on which he eventually settled in the *Ethics*, however unorthodox it may have been, nonetheless constituted for him an authentic attempt to extol a kind of existence that could be said to be 'without death' - a kind of 'deathlessness [*immortalitas*]'.

Life after 'rebirth'

In the table of contents found bound together with the *Short Treatise*, the title given for Part II is 'The second, treating of a Perfect Man, capable of uniting himself to God'.[10] This mystical-sounding title is reminiscent of something that Spinoza says in another early work, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*:

> [T]he highest good is to arrive - together with other individuals if possible - at the enjoyment of such a nature. What that nature is we shall show in its proper place: that is the knowledge of the union that the mind has with the whole of Nature.[11]

Acquiring such a nature is 'the true good' sought in the stirring opening passage of the work, with which Spinoza joins a long and distinguished ethical tradition. For like the philosophers of antiquity to whom we owe the tradition of ethical thought, Spinoza inaugurates his search for the good with a kind of confession, and a firm personal resolution to forgo the shallow pursuits of wealth, prestige and sensual pleasure.[12] He will direct his efforts instead towards the attainment of a certain human fulfilment, an ethically rich state, or 'highest human perfection'.[13] This ethical

[10] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, p. 60. In fact, the title given in the table of contents is different from that which is given at the beginning of Part II, which reads 'On Man and What Pertains to Him'. This is only the tip of an intimidating iceberg of difficulties posed by the text. Discovered only in the nineteenth century, the work consists almost in a kind of montage, with layer upon layer of (often conflicting) diachronic additions. While in the past this has made some doubt the very authenticity of the text, it is now generally agreed that, while the translation of the original Latin is probably not in his own hand, the work is indeed Spinoza's, and there is every reason to believe that the translation is reasonably faithful to the original. Provided the author's general motto, '*caute*', is heeded, the text can nonetheless reward careful study.

[11] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §13.

[12] For the confessional quality of this passage, and a comparison with classic confessional literature, see Moreau, *Spinoza*, p. 27 and *passim*.

[13] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §16.

perfection, according to Spinoza at the time of this work, consists in 'the knowledge of the union that the mind has with the whole of nature'.

More is said about a 'human nature much stronger and more enduring' in the *Short Treatise*.[14] In this work, the reader is told that acquiring the status of 'a Perfect Man' is achieved through a transformative 'rebirth'.[15] A life of capricious passion and materialistic desire, in which the whims of the body trump the better judgement of the mind, is transformed into a life of true love and rational identification with Nature (which, it turns out, is identical to God):

> For our first birth was when we were united with the body... But our other, or second, birth will occur when we become aware in ourselves of the completely different effects of love produced by knowledge... This [love of God] is as different [from love of the body] as the incorporeal is from the corporeal, the spirit from the flesh.
>
> This, therefore, may the more rightly and truly be called Rebirth, because, as we shall show, an eternal and immutable constancy comes only from the Love and Union.[16]

Before rebirth, Spinoza explains, a person's life is hindered by qualitatively inferior forms of knowledge and love: knowledge limited to hearsay and random experience, and love limited to lust for material and sensual pleasures. One detects several sources for this account of rebirth. There is the Stoic premium on equanimity (*ataraxia*), Leo Hebreo's conception of love as unification, Descartes' preference for the intellectual over the sensual (not to mention distinct echoes of mind-body dualism), as well as the idea of rebirth itself, which featured so centrally in the heterodox forms of Christianity to which many of Spinoza's friends and associates subscribed.[17]

In the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, the difference between lower and higher forms of love is said to consist in 'the quality of the object to which we cling'.[18] This differentiates a form of love that clings only to 'those things that can

---

[14] Ibid. §13.

[15] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 138 and *passim*.

[16] Ibid. p. 140.

[17] For the Stoicism in Spinoza's philosophy, see Susan James, 'Spinoza the Stoic', in *The Rise of Modern Philosophy: The Tension between the New and Traditional Philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibniz,* ed. Tom Sorell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 289-316. On the possible influence of Leo Hebreo, see Carl Gebhardt, 'Spinoza und der Platonismus', *Chronicon Spinozanum*, 1, pp. 178-234 (cited in Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I, p. 105, note 3). On the free-ranging religious views of Spinoza's associates, see Leszek Kolakowski*, Chrétiens sans église: La conscience religieuse et le lien confessionel au XII^e siècle*, trans. Anna Posner (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

[18] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §9.

perish' from a form of love that is directed instead 'toward the eternal and infinite thing'.[19] The impermanence and instability of the first kind of object means that the kind of love that clings to it will be plagued by 'strife', 'sadness', 'envy', and, in a word, 'disturbances of the mind'.[20] The eternal and divine quality of the second kind of object, in contrast, will allow for a love that 'feeds the mind with a joy entirely exempt from sadness'.[21] In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza expands on the close relationship between knowledge, love and the quality of that which is loved:

> Love, then, arises from the perception and knowledge which we have of a thing, and as the thing shows itself to be greater and more magnificent, so also is our Love greater and greater… Love… is nothing but enjoying a thing and being united with it. We divide it according to the qualities of the object man seeks to enjoy and unite with.[22]

To sum up Spinoza's early account of human fulfilment, a person, prior to rebirth, is subject to the unpredictability of his or her natural instincts and the turmoil of his or her passions, vulnerable to the vicissitudes of a life governed only loosely by inferior forms of knowledge and love. This puts one at risk of confusion, sorrow, and other 'disturbances of the mind'. But with the realisation of an inherent capacity for rational thought and intellectual insight, a 'rebirth' takes place, after which unreliable opinion is replaced with true knowledge, lust with true love, and, eventually, one stands to acquire that higher, special knowledge in which a thing is 'known through itself alone', and in which there is 'an immediate manifestation of the object itself to the intellect'.[23] With this special knowledge comes a special love - 'what a union! what a love!' - in which 'our blessedness consists', and through which 'all things are united through Nature, and united into one [being], viz. God'.[24] Such is the path of ethical fulfilment in these early works. But, in addition to these special forms of knowledge and love, and the resulting spiritual epiphany, there is also, he adds, 'an eternal and immutable constancy', which he takes up immediately in a chapter titled 'Of the Immortality of the Soul'.[25]

---

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid. §10.

[22] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, pp. 104-5.

[23] Ibid. pp. 138-9.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid. p. 140.

This curious chapter in the *Short Treatise* foreshadows the puzzle posed by the discussion of the mind's eternity in the *Ethics* with a puzzle of its own. The chapter begins, alluringly, with an invitation to 'consider attentively what the Soul is, and where its change and duration arise from', from which we would 'easily see whether it is mortal or immortal'.[26] The reader is then reminded what the 'soul' is:

> We have said, then, that the Soul is an Idea which is in the thinking thing, arising from the existence of a thing which is in Nature. From this it follows that as the duration and change of the thing are, so also the duration and change of the Soul must be.[27]

I will examine Spinoza's definition of the soul (and the mind) as the 'idea' of the body in Chapter 4. For now it is sufficient to note what seems to be a dependence (at least logically) of the former on the latter, a (logical) dependence of the soul on the body. So the 'thing which is in Nature' of which the soul is an 'idea', is the body, which 'comes to exist... through motion and rest'.[28] This seems to imply that were the body to lose its essential 'proportion of motion and rest' and perish, so too would the idea, or soul, which 'arises from' that body, lose *its* ground of existence and perish.[29] This consequence seems to follow with as much necessity as the demise of the mind seems to follow from that of the body in the *Ethics*. But in neither work does Spinoza draw this conclusion.

Instead, Spinoza returns to the dualistic tone of the previous chapter, in which it was said that 'the love of the body' is as different from 'the love of God' as 'the incorporeal is from the corporeal, the spirit from the flesh'.[30] He associates each of these kinds of love with its own fate for the soul:

> [W]e have noted that the Soul can be united either with the body of which it is the Idea or with God, without whom it can neither exist nor be understood.
>
> From this, then, one can easily see that:
>
> 1. if it is united with the body only, and the body perishes, then it must also perish; for if it lacks the body, which is the foundation of its love, it must perish with it; but that

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid. Preface.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid. p. 140.

> 2. if it is united with another thing, which is, and remains, immutable, then, on the contrary, it will have to remain immutable also. For through what would it then be possible that it should be able to perish?[31]

Spinoza does not go on to affirm either of these disjuncts, but it seems clear that it is the second of the two fates for the soul that he is urging the reader to strive for. The immortality of the soul described in the *Short Treatise* appears, then, to answer to Spinoza's ambition in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* to acquire 'the greatest joy, to eternity… to arrive - together with other individuals if possible - at the enjoyment of… the knowledge of the union that the mind has with the whole of Nature'.[32] But just as he warned in that work of misconceiving the true nature of the immortality of the soul (as the Stoics had done), we too must be careful to inquire into what he meant by this traditional religious phrase.[33] How must one, in Carlisle's words, 'rethink immortality through the Spinozistic lens'?[34]

'Heaven [and hell] is a place on Earth'[35]

So far a certain picture has emerged of the way that Spinoza thought about ethical fulfilment at this early stage of his development. The essential features of this preferred way of life include knowledge, love, joy, as well as a certain orientation with respect to human mortality. But what is this orientation? From the standpoint of the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza's considered answer to this question is still amorphous and uncertain, yet alluring and promising. It is in fact the same answer that Bayle long ago attributed to Spinoza. There is no question of reward or punishment awaiting us in the hereafter, so instead 'men should apply themselves to virtue on account of its excellence and because one finds enough advantage in the practice of morality in this life not to have anything to complain about'.[36] In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza has already rejected the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, and so it is unsurprising that the work at times gestures towards a naturalised

---

[31] Ibid. p. 141.

[32] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §1, §13.

[33] Ibid. §74.

[34] Carlisle, 'Spinoza on Eternal Life', forthcoming.

[35] Title and lyric of Belinda Carlisle's 1987 single, produced by Rick Nowels (MCA Records: 1987).

[36] Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary,* p. 295.

reinterpretation of 'heaven' and 'hell', not as transcendent dwellings in which one enjoys the rewards for one's labours or suffers in agony for a life ill-spent, but as conditions of 'this life' as it is presently lived. 'Sadness, despair, envy, fright, and other evil passions... are the real hell itself'.[37] One is reminded of the pearl of wisdom attributed to Guatama Buddha: 'You will not be punished for your anger; you will be punished by your anger.' Conversely, Spinoza explains that it is 'knowledge', and its manifestations in love and joy, in which '*our eternal salvation and happiness* really consist'.[38] However, although Bayle was right to find this message in Spinoza's philosophy, he was wrong to group him together with the 'Epicureans', who 'deny the immortality of the soul', for this is, as we have seen, part and parcel of his conception of ethical fulfilment (at least, in the *Short Treatise*).

This kind of ethic of human mortality was not unprecedented. As mentioned, it is implicit in certain strands of Buddhism.[39] Nor was it foreign to the western religious culture of Spinoza's time either. As Carlisle has pointed out, there are certain parallels between Spinoza's account and the doctrine of eternal life in the Johannine books of the New Testament:

> My contention is that while Spinoza rejects the orthodox Christian teaching on eternal life… he presents an alternative account of human eternity that is in certain respects faithful to the Johannine doctrine of eternal life, particularly as this is articulated in the First Letter of John.[40]

It is worth remembering that Spinoza chose a quotation from the First Letter of John for the title page of his *Theological-Political Treatise*: 'Through this means we recognise that we remain in God, and God remains in us - that He gave to us from His own Spirit'.[41] As for the First Letter of John itself, 'eternal life' is given a present, as well as a future, dimension, and is explained as a qualitatively distinct existential orientation arising out of love for others:

---

[37] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 128. This remark bears a (perhaps coincidental) resemblance to a line spoken by Laertes in *Hamlet*: 'Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself'. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 4, Scene v.

[38] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, pp. 128-9, emphasis added.

[39] However, mainstream Buddhist theology would probably align more with the kind of transcendental picture against which Spinoza was rebelling. As Ray Anderson observes: 'What appears to be a common assumption between the Hindu, Buddhist and Greek concept of death is a fundamental dualism with regard to the reality of the "otherworldly" and the unreality of this present temporal existence.' Ray S. Anderson, *Theology, Death and Dying* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 8.

[40] Carlisle, 'Spinoza on Eternal Life', forthcoming.

[41] *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, 1 John 4: 13.

> We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them.[42]

Spinoza, too, can be read as having articulated a philosophy of life. The 'wisdom' of the 'free man' consists in 'a meditation on life, not on death'.[43] Sylvain Zac has a lovely way of characterising this comportment of Spinoza's philosophy:

> One can centre all Spinozist themes around the notion of life: God is life itself; extension, an attribute of God, constitutes a living dynamism; all things live in God and are animated to different degrees; living beings are not machines and exhibit the traits of individuality, uniqueness, specificity and adaptation; reason, adequate consciousness of oneself, of things and of God, is the "true life of the mind"; eternity is an "eternity of life" and not an "eternity of death".[44]

The Judaism in which Spinoza was first schooled also includes certain tendencies towards a more immanent, or realised, eschatology, as expressed, for example, in the *Kaddish*: 'May He establish His Kingdom during your life and during your days, and during the life of all the house of Israel.'[45] However, if Nadler's recent suggestion is correct, then despite their presence in Judaism itself, it was perhaps Spinoza's endorsement of these very strands that led to his virulent expulsion from the Amsterdam Synagogue. For an insistence on strict adherence to a doctrinal belief in the afterlife may have arisen, Nadler suggests, out of a deep concern for the souls of *converso* brethren in Iberia, who had ostensibly left the nation of Israel and thus 'forfeited their right to a place in *olam haba*'.[46] Nadler explains:

> One can easily imagine, in fact, that the Dutch Sephardim generally, solicitous as they were about the eternal fate of those members of Israel still compelled to live as Christians in Iberia, were very sensitive on the question of immortality, and would not have been tolerant of one who would deny altogether a future life in the hereafter.[47]

Whether Nadler's conjecture is correct or not, it is clear that, from an early stage, Spinoza was beginning to apply his more general framework of immanence to the

---

[42] 1 John 2:14-5.

[43] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p67.

[44] Zac, *L'idée de vie*, p. 15, translation my own.

[45] *Kaddish*, in *Authorised Daily Prayer-Book*, trans. S. Singer (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1908), p. 86. Quoted in Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, p. 23. Compare this with John 18:36: 'My kingdom is not of *this* world.'

[46] Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy*, p. 160.

[47] Ibid. p. 165.

question of human eschatology. However, as mentioned above, the application of this framework to theological matters was not carried out with total conviction in the *Short Treatise*. As is characteristic of the text more generally, these inklings of a realised eschatology jostle with incompatible vestiges of a more traditional, transcendent, notion of an afterlife. The text of the *Short Treatise* is highly complex, and its palimpsestic quality defies any simple, straightforward interpretation. In Chapter 4, I will venture a hypothetical reconstruction of the evolving eschatology buried in its diachronic layers. For now it may be enough to note that these remnants of a transcendental eschatology seem to go hand-in-hand with Spinoza's earlier conceptions of 'eternity' and 'mind', or 'soul [*ziel*]'. For this reason, and not least because, when Spinoza came to compose the *Ethics*, he dispensed with the language of 'immortality [*onstervelijkheid*]' altogether, preferring to elaborate a doctrine of the 'eternity of (part) of the mind [*æternitas (partis) mentis*]', I will now turn to look more closely at the notion of eternity and its evolving place in Spinoza's thought.

From here to eternity

Although Spinoza defines 'eternity' at the very outset of the *Ethics*, what he means by the term is still fraught with debate today. At times it seems as though he endorses the Platonic view that, while eternity (*aeon*, for Plato) in a sense characterises the true nature of things, duration (or time, *chronos*, for Plato) is somehow illusory, a mere 'moving image of eternity'.[48] 'Eternity', Spinoza explains, is 'existence itself', whereas 'duration [*duratio*]' is merely 'existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly'.[49] But he also seems unwilling to deny the reality of duration. It is defined as 'an indefinite continuation of existing', which sounds real enough.[50] It is also a notion implicated in key parts of the *Ethics* involving change, such as the infinite mode of 'motion and rest', the physics outlined in the 'digression' of Part II, and the transition between joy and sadness which underpins the psychology of the

[48] Plato, *Timæous*, 37d, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Jowett, vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 723.

[49] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1def8, 2p45s.

[50] Ibid. 2def5.

affects in Part III.[51] This is further complicated by the problem of how these two notions relate to each other. While eternity 'cannot be explained by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end', and 'in eternity, there is neither *when*, nor *before*, nor *after*', nevertheless 'God's omnipotence *has been* actual from eternity and *will remain* in the same actuality to eternity', and - our old friend - 'something of [the mind] *remains* which is eternal'.[52]

It is unsurprising, then, that the debate continues unabated. What is surprising, perhaps, is that the debate should lend itself to a reasonably linear spectrum of positions. For interpretative responses to these issues tend to cluster around one of two poles, corresponding to two different meanings of 'eternity', whose joint history, Wolfson points out, can be traced back to antiquity:

> Like the twofold meanings with which so many of our other philosophic terms have started their historical careers, they may be designated the Platonic and the Aristotelian. Briefly stated, the difference between these two meanings is as follows. To Plato eternity is the antithesis of time and it means the exclusion of any kind of temporal relations. To Aristotle eternity is only endless time.[53]

In the *Timæous*, Plato complains that there is a kind of category mistake involved in applying tensed language to something that exists eternally and therefore timelessly:

> For there were no days and nights and months and years before the heaven was created, but when he constructed the heaven he created them also. They are all parts of time, and the past and future are created species of time, which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to the eternal being; for we say that it "was", or "is", or "will be", but the truth is that "is" alone is properly attributed to it, and that "was" and "will be" are only to be spoken of becoming in time, for they are motions, but that which is immovably the same for ever cannot become older or younger by time.[54]

Thus Plato calls time a 'moving image of eternity... moving according to number', to contrast it with the principle that 'eternity itself rests in unity'.[55] For Aristotle, on the other hand, there is at least one legitimately temporal sense of 'eternity', for he takes the beginningless and endless existence of the cosmos, though not *in* time in the sense of being contained by it, to be at least *with* time in that it exists 'when time exists':

---

[51] Letter 64; Spinoza, *The Letters*, p. 299; *Ethics*, 2p13s and *passim*; 3p11s.

[52] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1def8, 1p33s2, 1p17s, 5p23, emphasis added.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Plato, *Timaeous*, 37d.

[55] Ibid.

> Clearly then "to be in time" has the same meaning for other things also, namely, that their being should be measured by time. "To be in time" is one of two things: (1) to exist when time exists, (2) as we say of some things that they are "in number"… [T]he "now" and the "before" and the like are in time, just as "unit" and "odd" and "even" are in number… If this is so, they are contained by time as things are contained by place.[56]

So Aristotle allows a conception of eternity, i.e. (1), 'when time exists', that amounts to 'existence at all times', or what Kneale calls 'sempiternity'.[57] This forms the substance of Wolfson's distinction between the 'Platonic' and 'Aristotelian' meanings of 'eternity'.

The Aristotelian sense of eternity is perhaps the more intuitive of the two, and corresponds to the way that people tend to think about the term. Expressions like 'for all eternity', and 'it would take an eternity', which occur in everyday discourse, certainly suggest a temporal, and perhaps even an *omni*-temporal meaning. It is also, according to Kneale, the easier of the two to define:

> Of the two notions with which we are concerned, that of sempiternity is comparatively simple. A sempiternal object is one which exists at all moments of time, whether we believe time to be finite in one or both directions or infinite in both.[58]

Eternity in the sense of 'timelessness', on the other hand, is somewhat further from everyday thinking, and somewhat more difficult to explicate. For one thing, the term 'timelessness' by itself seems to have no positive content of its own, meaning what it does only through a negation of the term 'time'. The Platonic meaning of eternity seems to be defined in a primarily negative way, which serves to highlight the crucial respect in which it contrasts with the Aristotelian meaning. In itself, the term is, so to speak, 'empty', open to different ways of supplying the positive content. How did Plato himself understand the positive content of 'eternity'?

> Beginning as an adjective of those eternal beings… it came to be used, as it so often happens with terms, as a surrogate for those beings… In this capacity of

---

[56] Aristotle, *Physica*, in *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. William D. Ross, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), IV.12, 221a.

[57] Kneale, 'Eternity and Sempiternity', p. 223.

[58] Ibid. p. 227.

> a substantive, the term eternal… epitomised to Plato all the essential differences between his world of ideas and his world of sense.[59]

There are two important things to note about this characterisation of Plato's conception of eternity. Firstly, the term refers to a *kind* of existence, and in particular to a 'ceaseless existence' that differs in further specifiable ways from the kind of existence enjoyed by 'other kinds of beings'. Secondly, there is a set of 'characteristics' that serves to specify the nature of this kind of existence. This set of characteristics derives, for Plato, from the 'differences between his world of ideas and his world of sense'.[60] Whereas 'the world of ideas is beginningless... the world of sense had a beginning in an act of creation', and whereas 'the world of ideas is immovable, immutable, and indivisible... the world of sense is subject to motion, change and division'.[61] Therefore, the positive content of eternity, for Plato, came to include 'permanence, unity, immutability, identity, and indivisibility'.[62] However, the set of characteristics by which the kind of existence said to be 'eternal' is distinguished from other kinds of existence could be otherwise. Thus whereas the Aristotelian sense of eternity is defined principally in *quantitative* terms, that is, in terms of a maximal number of moments in time, the Platonic sense of eternity, put positively, is defined in *qualitative* terms, that is, in terms of a certain *kind* of existence, the nature of which could well be specified in different ways.

Returning to Spinoza, then, one finds that interpretations generally tend to attribute to him either a Platonic or an Aristotelian understanding of eternity, that is, either a *qualitative*, or a *quantitative*, conception. For clarity, and to avoid the temptation to import peculiarities from either Plato or Aristotle, I will set aside Wolfson's labels for the distinction and refer to these two senses of eternity with the neutral adjectives 'qualitative' and 'quantitative'. At first sight, it seems fairly straightforward that Spinoza adopted a 'qualitative' understanding of the term. For the definition at (1def8) emphatically insists that eternity 'cannot be explained by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end', which seems unequivocally to rule out a definition in terms of 'moments in time', even if the number of moments is infinitely many. This is an interpretation with a long and distinguished pedigree. Pollock, for example, concluded that eternity for

---

[59] Wolfson, *Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. II, p. 359.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

Spinoza 'is not a continuance of existence but a manner of existence; something which can be realised here and now as much as at any other time and place'.[63] Similarly, Joachim was of the view that 'eternity', for Spinoza, 'expresses timeless necessity of being, and has nothing to do with lasting through an 'infinitely long' time'.[64] More recently, Harris has joined this cohort, concluding that 'eternity', for Spinoza, 'is thus not a continued duration... but a quality of being'.[65]

But the opposing, 'quantitative', interpretation has its fair share of eminent adherents too. Wolfson at times seemed to hold that, at least with respect to the infinite modes, Spinoza countenanced a temporal sense of eternity:

> "Eternal" means only to be immutable, or to exist forever, as Spinoza directly expresses himself in Proposition XXI, or to have indeterminate existence or duration, as he indirectly expresses himself in the Demonstration to Proposition XXI where he describes the opposite of it to have "determinate existence or duration."[66]

Curley has since agreed that 'always [*semper*]' at (1p21) implies temporality ('omnitemporality to be sure, but temporality none the less'), and more recently Donagan has sought to deflect the 'appearance' that 'Spinoza conceived eternity 'Platonically', as no more than an 'illusion.'[67] Siding with Kneale, he argues that it is 'closer to his usage to say that eternity, as he conceived it, is equivalent to necessarily omnitemporal existence, understanding "omnitemporal" as meaning "at all moments in the passage of time"'.[68]

Some have taken a more complicated view of the matter. Kneale, for example, has submitted a certain 'conjecture as to history':

> Spinoza began with a Platonic view of eternity as timelessness sharply separated from duration… a way of thinking [that] persists into the *Ethics*… but by the time he came to write Part V, he was thinking in a more Aristotelian way.[69]

Clearly this is a somewhat bold stance to adopt (reflecting perhaps the desperate nature of the puzzle), implying, as it does, either that Spinoza did not make a

---

[63] Pollock, *Spinoza*, p. 275.

[64] Joachim, *Ethics of Spinoza*, pp. 297-8.

[65] Errol Harris, 'Spinoza's Theory of Human Immortality', in *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. Maurice Mandelbaum and Eugene Freeman (LaSalle: Open Court, 1975), p. 250.

[66] Wolfson, *Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. II, p. 376.

[67] Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, p. 107; Donagan, 'Spinoza's Proof of Immortality', p. 242.

[68] Ibid. p. 244.

[69] Kneale, 'Eternity and Sempiternity', p. 238.

considered review of the overall consistency of the *Ethics*, or that he did do this but somehow allowed this particular dissonance to remain in the work. Having said that, Kneale's 'conjecture as to history' is not implausible either. Given the lengthy gestation period of the *Ethics*, in which time Spinoza could well have changed his mind about certain things, and the fact that the work was composed in successive stages and circulated piecemeal among friends, which could have allowed disparities to creep in between one part and another, Kneale's conjecture is possible (though I think it fails to accommodate the Platonic remarks in what she takes to be the Aristotelian section of the text).[70]

The secondary literature thus offers a rich spectrum of interpretations for Spinoza's conception of *æternitas*. Where on that spectrum, assuming it is exhaustive, do the texts themselves point to?

Disambiguating eternity

In Spinoza's earlier works, one finds a somewhat ambiguous use of the concept of eternity. One reads, in the opening passage of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, of his ambition to discover 'the true good', which, 'once found and acquired, would *continuously* give [him] the greatest joy, *to* eternity', the adverb 'continuously [*continua*]' apparently suggesting a kind of eternity involving a stretch or quantity of duration.[71] But towards the end of the work one encounters an interesting passage in which there begins to emerge a foreshadowing of the distinction in his mature writings between the category of duration - of time and place, and, in a word, circumstance - and the category of the eternal, that is, of the fixed and immutable, 'inmost' essence of things:

> The essences of singular, changeable things are not to be drawn from their series, or [*sive*] order of existing, since it offers us nothing but extrinsic denominations, relations, or at most, circumstances, all of which are far from the inmost essence of things. That essence is to be sought only from the fixed and eternal things, and at the same time from the laws inscribed in these

[70] For the publication history of the *Ethics*, and compelling evidence vindicating the consistency of the text (*pace* Keale), see Piet Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's Ethica from manuscript to print: Studies on text, form and related topics* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1994). For an example of a remark left unaccounted for by Kneale's conjecture, see Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p29dem.

[71] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §1, emphasis added.

> things, as in their true codes, according to which all singular things come to be, and are ordered.[72]

That the category of the eternal is conceived here in a fundamentally *sui generis* way is then confirmed by the further affirmation that 'by nature, all these [fixed and eternal] things are at once', which is to say, they are not to be understood as ordered in temporal succession, and so perhaps not to be understood as *temporal* at all.[73]

There is a good deal more about eternity in the *Short Treatise*, though here too much of it can seem incongruous. In a chapter titled 'Of God's Necessary Actions', the reader finds an incongruous juxtaposition of the Platonic-sounding claim that 'in eternity there is neither before nor after' with the Aristotelian-sounding characterisation of God as one 'who is now, ever has been, and will remain to all eternity'.[74] Later on in the work, there is some reflection on 'what our love of God is, and its effect, our *eternal duration*', and then in the concluding chapter, and 'in a different way than before, [on] the *eternal and constant duration* of the intellect', apparently without any concern for the difficulty there may be in assimilating eternity to duration.[75]

Can these early vacillations be accounted for by attributing to Spinoza a non-univocal conception of eternity, as in the tradition of Aristotle or Boethius?[76] Such a hypothesis would in fact fit these two earlier texts, but it is not in the end compelling, because if Spinoza did think about 'eternity' in a multivalent way, one would expect some indication of this in the text. In any case, he would soon give what appears to be a fairly univocal explication of the concept in the *Metaphysical Thoughts*, appended

---

[72] Ibid. §101.

[73] In this respect, Spinoza is echoing an established tradition of expressing the timelessness of eternity as a kind of being 'all at once'. Boethius, for example, defines the notion as follows: 'Eternity is the whole, simultaneous, perfect possession of limitless life.' Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, V.6, trans. David R. Slavitt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 168. Some, however, have questioned the coherence of the notion of a '*total simul*'. See, for example, William Kneale, 'Time and Eternity'. But it is not clear that the challenge is decisive, since it seems to be precisely the intention of the expression to indicate the *inadequacy* of temporal language for expressing something that is eternal. That the expression is incoherent, when taken literally, is perhaps unsurprising.

[74] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, I, pp. 82-3. Compare this with a similarly jarring pair in the *Ethics*. Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p33s2, 1p17s.

[75] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 142, p. 149, emphasis added.

[76] Aristotle distinguishes between at least two possible senses of eternity, including the 'qualitative' sense that Wolfson attributes to Plato and his own sense of 'being with time'. See note 56 above. Boethius distinguishes between God's eternity and the world's perpetuity: 'The endless and infinite changing of things in time is an attempt to imitate eternity, but it cannot equal its immobility and it fails to achieve the eternal present…it is balanced on the knife-edge of the present… All this is to say that if we use proper terms, then, following Plato, we should say that God is eternal but the world is perpetual.' Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, pp. 169-70.

to his exposition of *Descartes' "Principles of Philosophy"*.[77] The verdict on Spinoza's earliest writings on eternity seems then to be that he was from the beginning sympathetic to a sharp distinction between the temporal (or 'durational') and the eternal, that is, sympathetic to a 'qualitative' conception of eternity, but he had perhaps not yet become accustomed to abiding at all times to his own admonitions not to conflate the two. Thus, in this younger stage of his development, he would at one moment warn sternly against confusing the eternal with the durational, only at the next moment to make such a slip himself. Such wavering is perhaps to be expected at a stage of one's intellectual development when the course of time has yet to instil the habit of conforming at all times to some sharply drawn distinction.

It is in the *Metaphysical Thoughts* that Spinoza eventually sets out a more careful, considered and, apparently univocal, conception of eternity.[78] In a chapter dedicated to the nature 'Of God's Eternity', the reader is told that eternity differs from duration in the same way that the existence of God differs from that of created things, with the fundamental difference between these two kinds of existence being that, whereas existence is of the very essence of God, the same is not true of created things.[79] Given the essence of a created thing, its 'whatness', a question can still be raised about its 'thatness' (that is, whether or not it exists), but the same cannot be said of God. Understanding the essence of God, according to Spinoza, simply is to understand *that* he exists, and conversely, to understand that God exists, is to understand *what* God is, that is, Being itself:

> From this we conclude… that the created thing can be said to enjoy existence, because existence is not of its essence; but God cannot be said to enjoy existence, for the existence of God is God himself, as is his essence also; from which it follows that created things enjoy duration, but that God does not in any way.[80]

It is interesting to note, and it will be addressed in the next chapter, that in the *Metaphysical Thoughts* both eternity and duration are characterised as *attributes* 'under

---

[77] Spinoza, *Cogitata Metaphysica*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, vol. I, *Opera* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925), II, pp. 249-52. Translations of this text, unless stated otherwise, are from *Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts*, in Curley ed., *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I, pp. 299-346.

[78] While one must remember that Spinoza is still ostensibly writing here in the guise of Descartes' expositor, I nonetheless agree with Martineau that this text provides an 'accepted record of past opinion still in the process of modification'. Martineau, *Study of Spinoza*, p. 289. In any case, it seems clear that Spinoza, in this case, is speaking *in propria persona*, since this is not a concept to which Descartes ever directly gives his attention.

[79] Spinoza, *Metaphysical Thoughts*, II, pp. 315-8.

[80] Ibid. pp. 317-8.

which we conceive' these different kinds of existence.[81] Whereas eternity is said to be '*an attribute under which we conceive the infinite existence of God*', duration is said to be '*an attribute under which we conceive the existence of created things insofar as they persevere in their actuality*'.[82] It is here also that Spinoza defines time as a sort of concept, or a 'mode of thinking', formed in the intellect through a comparison between the duration of things that have 'a certain and determinate motion' and the duration of other things, so as to measure or 'determine' the latter with reference to the former.[83]

So when Spinoza came to compose his mature philosophy in the *Ethics*, a sharp qualitative distinction between eternity and duration was by then well rooted in his thought. In light of this, the reader is not surprised to find that the definition of eternity given at the outset of the work is supplemented with the warning that it 'cannot be explained by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end'.[84] This distinction is upheld throughout Part I. For example, Spinoza insists that 'in eternity, there is neither *when*, nor *before*, nor *after*'.[85] It persists into Part II, in which duration is characterised as 'existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly', and so implicitly contrasted with 'the *very nature* of existence', which, the reader remembers from the definition, is how one is to understand eternity (that is, as 'existence *itself*').[86] There is nothing that contravenes the distinction in Parts III and IV. It is only with the passage concerning the mind's eternity in Part V that the reader seems to encounter a flagrant transgression. The problematic passage is introduced with a surprising mention of duration: 'So it is time now to pass to those things which pertain to the Mind's *duration* without relation to the body.'[87] If the discussion that follows is indeed about the mind's *eternity*, and eternity and duration are, by the time of the *Ethics*, sharply distinguished, then how could the ensuing discussion have anything to do with the mind's *duration*?

---

[81] Ibid. I, p. 310.

[82] Ibid. This echoes Descartes' characterisation of duration, except he calls it a 'mode' instead of an 'attribute', and he does not provide a complimentary characterisation for eternity: 'we should regard the duration of a thing simply as a mode under which we conceive the thing in so far as it continues to exist'. Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I, §55, p. 211, AT VIII.26.

[83] Spinoza, *Metaphysical Thoughts*, I, p. 310. Again, this echoes Descartes: 'But in order to measure the duration of all things, we compare their duration with the duration of the greatest and most regular motions which give rise to years and days, and we call this duration "time". Yet nothing is thereby added… except for a mode of thought.' Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I, §57, p. 212, AT VIII.27.

[84] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1def8.

[85] Ibid. 1p33s2.

[86] Ibid. 2p45s, 1def8, emphasis added.

[87] Ibid. 5p20s, emphasis added.

Joachim has brushed this solecism aside as a mere 'momentary slip',[88] but it is a 'slip' that reappears at least twice in the same critical passage. Something of the mind is said to 'remain' at (5p23), and it is said that 'the more the Mind knows things by the second and third kind of knowledge, the greater the part of it that remains'.[89] The language of 'remaining' in these remarks seems to involve a decidedly temporal significance, and it is because of this sudden transgression of Spinoza's strict distinction between eternity and duration that Kneale has proposed her 'conjecture as to history'. Her suggestion is that, 'by the time he came to write Part V... Spinoza was thinking in a more Aristotelian way' about eternity, a change which Kneale suggests took place in the course of the writing the *Ethics* itself.[90]

I have already granted that this suggestion, though bold, is not wildly implausible, since the *Ethics* was composed in distinct fragments over a lengthy period of time. However, aside from the unwelcome implication that he somehow allowed this inconsistency to creep in and remain in the finished work, Kneale's conjecture is compromised by what Spinoza actually says about eternity in this very passage. The crucial evidence is at (5p29dem), in which the strict distinction between eternity and duration is reaffirmed, citing, no less, the strict definition at (1def8): 'eternity', Spinoza reiterates, 'cannot be explained by duration (by Id8 and its explanation)'.[91] This seems sufficient to disprove Kneale's conjecture, and so the history of the development of this concept over Spinoza's successive writings seems more likely to be something like that sketched in this chapter. That is, from the beginning Spinoza was impressed with the Platonic antithesis between eternity and duration, but he would not succeed in consistently keeping the two terms and their respective entailments apart until later in his intellectual development, perhaps not until around the time of writing the *Metaphysical Thoughts*. By the time he came to write the *Ethics*, however, the distinction was firmly embedded. But what, then, are we to make of the problematic remarks in *Ethics* V?

[88] Joachim, *Ethics of Spinoza*, p. 296.

[89] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p38dem.

[90] Kneale, 'Eternity and Sempiternity', p. 238.

[91] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p29dem.

Immortality as eternity, eternity as a way of life

What I hope has emerged over the course of this chapter is the following. Prior to writing the *Ethics*, Spinoza advocated a certain doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Also prior to the *Ethics*, despite his sporadic insistence that the concepts of eternity and duration be kept strictly apart, he would still occasionally conflate the two. When one turns to the *Ethics*, however, one notices two interesting and, it seems, related things. Firstly, Spinoza's language changes. Where he had previously spoken of the immortality of the soul, he now speaks only of the eternity of (part of) the mind. Secondly, when Spinoza comes to write the *Ethics*, he is by now a practised adherent to a sharp distinction between eternity and duration. Taken together, these two things may seem to support the line of interpretation favoured by Yovel, Moreau and Nadler, outlined at the beginning of this chapter. If, in the *Ethics*, eternity has nothing to do with duration, then the eternity of the mind need not entail any continuation of the mind's existence beyond the death of the body, and so it is perhaps unsurprising that Spinoza no longer seems to care about the immortality of the soul. The problematic remarks of *Ethics* V could perhaps just be accounted for as 'slips' *à la* Joachim, or as a kind of concession to popular imagination *à la* Curley.[92]

But there is a nagging dissatisfaction in reducing these climactic pages of the *Ethics* to silly blunders or imaginative exaggerations, neither of which are exactly typical of Spinoza. Moreover, one cannot help feeling that a 'reductive' approach to Spinoza's religiosity loses something of the philosopher's intellectual profile. The change in language between the *Short Treatise* and the *Ethics* may well reflect a significant change in how Spinoza thought about the problem of human mortality, but it need not reflect a dismissal of that problem altogether. Perhaps the eschatology presented in the *Short Treatise* was in a sense the first step towards a more refined response that would not come fully to fruition until the *Ethics*. Obscured by a patchy adherence to the distinction between eternity and duration - notions that would only be carefully separated once and for all in the *Metaphysical Thoughts* - as well as a conception of mind-body union yet to outgrow all of its Cartesian origins, the *Short Treatise* could perhaps do no more than show the tangled beginnings of the kind of response that Spinoza was beginning to envisage.

---

[92] Joachim, *Ethics of Spinoza*, p. 296; Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 85.

However, despite these limitations, there is undoubtedly already in that work a focus on the ethical transformation that one should seek to undergo in 'this life', a transformation that is at once cognitive, psychological, agapic, moral and, it seems, spiritual. If there is a unity in all these aspects, then it is that there is to be found in each of these dimensions a certain freedom: freedom from dogma or ignorance, freedom from the turmoil of the passions, freedom from material and sensual diversions, freedom from an anti-social all-against-all, and finally even a freedom (of some kind) from death. Phrasing these kinds of freedom as being 'from' their respective form of captivity is not to suggest that Spinoza understood freedom as 'negative', or as consisting in the absence of outside pressures, but rather that these outside pressures are to be mastered through a positive, and active, expression of one's true nature. The central and unifying importance of freedom for this ethical transformation explains the title of the concluding chapter of the *Short Treatise*, 'Of True Freedom', in which Spinoza rounds up, '[t]o bring this work to an end, it remains now to indicate briefly what human freedom consists in'.[93] In this characterisation of 'true freedom', Spinoza adds the mind's eternity:

> The true intellect can never come to perish, for in itself it can have no cause to make itself perish... And because it has not proceeded from external causes, but from God... and he is an internal cause, it follows necessarily that it cannot perish, so long as this, its cause, remains... Now this, its cause, is eternal. Therefore, it too [is eternal].[94]

Of course, orthodox theology had itself always made what awaits us in the afterlife a punishment or reward for what one does in this life, but if one is to be sensitive to the spirit of Spinoza's philosophy, one must, like Yovel, find the theology of a transcendental *quid pro quo* to be 'totally foreign' to it. But unlike Yovel *et al*, who deny that there is any doctrine of the immortality of the soul in the *Ethics*, and so posit a sharp departure in his thought from the earlier endorsement of such a doctrine in the *Short Treatise*, to be truly faithful to the spirit of Spinoza's ethical thought from its earliest expression, one must find this traditional theological picture to be foreign even to his *younger* sensibility. Indeed, as early as the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza had warned of imagining 'confusedly' the true nature of immortality.[95] Instead of a radical change of view between his earlier

[93] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, pp. 146-7.

[94] Ibid. p. 148.

[95] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §74.

works and the *Ethics*, it might make more sense to acknowledge a certain continuity in his thought, if not in every detail, or in the clarity and consistency, of his response to the problem, then at least in his enduring preoccupation with it, and even in the novelty of his emerging response to it.

It can therefore be conceded to Yovel *et al* that, to Spinoza, the 'transcendent-religious idea of an afterlife... is foreign', but this insight must be extended further and asserted of both the young and mature Spinoza. As a result, and contrary to the implication that there was an abandonment in the *Ethics* of what had been in the *Short Treatise* a heartfelt engagement with the question of human immortality, the *Short Treatise* might instead be read as being more continuous with the *Ethics* than such a sharp break might allow. However, and herein lies the significance of this picture of Spinoza's development for the meaning of the eternity of the mind in his later thought, the *Ethics* might, equally, be read as being more continuous with the *Short Treatise*. This makes room for a compromise between (1), the idea that in the *Short Treatise* there were already the beginnings of a radical eschatology that would nevertheless only come fully to maturity in the *Ethics* because they were still entangled in a confused way with temporality and mind-body dualism, and (2), the idea that the *Ethics*, despite shaking off many of these confusions, in doing so abandoned neither the eschatological concerns of the *Short Treatise* nor the general shape of this incipient response to them.

If, in the *Ethics*, Spinoza is willing to subvert the popular, 'quantitative', understanding of eternity, then why should he not be just as willing to subvert the corresponding conception of immortality? If the eschatology of the *Ethics* conveys a state of existence for which death has lost its force, a kind of 'deathlessness' or '*immortalitas*', then that doctrine, under the rubric of the 'eternity of the mind', perhaps deserves to be understood as a continuation of the efforts in the *Short Treatise* to radicalise the theology of immortality. And, if so, then the 'immortality reading' endorsed by Wolfson *et al* might be granted as much a concession as that of Yovel *et al*. Such a compromise between the two sides of the debate becomes possible if one accepts the hypothesis that, whereas the *Short Treatise* contains a muddled earlier version of Spinoza's attempt to respond to this theological problem, limited essentially because certain ideas and distinctions had yet to be clearly thought through or kept separate, the *Ethics* brings this nascent approach to its maturity

through a more refined and developed treatment of those same constituent ideas and distinctions.

That Spinoza had already begun in the *Short Treatise* to transpose the eschatological from the 'next' to 'this' life is evident from his rejection in that work of the traditional theology of eternal punishment: 'sadness, despair, envy, fright, and other evil passions... are the real hell itself.'[96] The flip-side of this kind of 'damnation' is the condition of one who has undergone a 'rebirth' and lives a life of true knowledge and love, and can sing as much with Belinda Carlisle that 'heaven is a place on earth', as with the Spinoza of the *Ethics* that '*Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself*'.[97] This is the 'true freedom' described in the closing chapter of the *Short Treatise*. However, despite taking these early steps towards the radical eschatology of the *Ethics*, the *Short Treatise*, with its occasional conflation of eternity and duration and its underdeveloped conception of mind-body union, could never do more than express these ideas in a way that jumbled them together with the more conservative, Cartesian approach of providing a philosophical basis for a traditional and dualistic notion of an afterlife. This is the kind of eschatology to which Spinoza alludes when he claims that what has been shown in the work is 'the eternal and constant duration of the intellect'.[98] It would only be when he came to write the *Ethics* that his eschatology would benefit from a sustained separation of eternity and duration, and a completed subversion of the Cartesian conception of the mind-body relationship. But if he was in the process of overturning the orthodox theology of human immortality, then just what was this new way of responding to the problem? If the path to 'deathlessness' need not involve a traditional appeal to the afterlife, then how else might it be understood? Finding an answer to this question calls for an inquiry into just what it was for Spinoza about the *way of life* meant by 'eternity' that secures for the mind (or at least a 'part' of it) a freedom of sorts from death, and why he took this to be part and parcel of 'true freedom'.

[96] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 128.

[97] Carlisle, 'Heaven is a Place on Earth'; Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p42s.

[98] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 149.

Yet, when we have settled what the Attributes are not, there is no small difficulty in finding an unexceptionable term to describe what they are… The least unsatisfactory word I can suggest is aspect.

Frederick Pollock, *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy*

Chapter 3

Aspects of Substance

In the previous chapter, it was noted how, in the *Ethics*, Spinoza came to replace the language of the 'immortality of the soul' with that of the 'eternity of (part of) the mind'. I have suggested that this lexical shift reflects less a rejection of the earlier work's innovative (but inchoate) response to the theological question of human mortality than a renewed effort to underline how unorthodox his take on this question had been all along. Although not entirely clearly or consistently, he had in the *Short Treatise* begun to transpose the eschatological from the 'next' to 'this' life. By the time he came to write the *Ethics*, he had disentangled and refined this approach, deeming it to be more clearly expressed with the language of 'eternity'. This is because Spinoza had come to settle on what I have called a 'qualitative' conception of eternity. With this shift in language, his innovative approach to human eschatology, already faintly visible in the *Short Treatise*, could now more easily be seen to be about an existential condition pertaining to 'this life', a question of directing oneself towards life and not death. In order to explain what it is about this particular kind of existence that he thought renders an adequate response to the question of human mortality, it is first necessary to explain the basic metaphysical category to which eternity belongs in his philosophy. This broader category, which he calls 'species [*species*]', includes two contrasting modes of existence (and cognition): 'duration [*duratio*]' and 'eternity [*æternitas*]'. By comparison with another basic metaphysical category in his system, the 'attributes [*attributi*]', I will in this chapter suggest a way of understanding the species of duration and eternity that will clarify the sense in which eternity is to be understood as a certain 'way of life'.

'What is substance?'[1]

In the *Metaphysical Thoughts*, Spinoza devotes a small subsection to the double-edged question, 'What eternity is; What duration is'.[2] He says there, somewhat elliptically: 'Of *eternity* we shall speak more fully later. Here we say only that it is *an attribute under which we conceive the infinite existence of God. But duration is an attribute under which we conceive the existence of created things insofar as they persevere in their actuality*'.[3] This is an intriguing gloss on these two notions for at least three reasons. It is intriguing because (1), the two concepts are characterised in tandem - as being two kinds of the same thing, that is 'attributes [*attributi*]' under which existence is conceived; (2) they are characterised as attributes at all - a term with a very precise role in Spinoza's mature metaphysics; and (3), they are defined in terms of their relation to 'conceiving [*concipere*]' - an epistemological notion. Except for the use of the term 'attribute', this characterisation resembles that of the kind of cognition Spinoza says is framed 'under a certain species of eternity [*sub quadam specie æternitatis*]'.[4] Of course, in the *Metaphysical Thoughts*, he is still ostensibly rehearsing the philosophy of Descartes, who indeed regards 'the duration of a thing simply as a mode under which we conceive the thing in so far as it continues to exist', and understands by '*mode*… exactly the same as what is elsewhere meant by an *attribute*'.[5] So, in order to separate Descartes' position on the question of 'attributes' from Spinoza's, and, at the same time, trace the immediate historical precedent for Spinoza's use of the term, it will be illuminating to set out in brief Descartes' views on the matter.

Despite his famous caricature as the radical upstart who set philosophy on its modern course by liberating it from the obscure extravagances of scholasticism, Descartes himself in fact retained a keen interest in at least one of the central metaphysical questions that had exercised Aristotle and the 'schools' that later

---

[1] Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, in *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. William D. Ross, vol. VIII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), Z.1, 1028b.

[2] Spinoza, *Metaphysical Thoughts*, I, p. 310.

[3] Ibid. (emphasis in original).

[4] Spinoza develops an account of this kind of cognition both in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and in the *Ethics*. This being a constant in his thought, he would clearly have been aware of the resemblance here. See Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §108; *Ethics*, 2p44c2.

[5] Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I, §§55-6, p. 211, AT VIII.26.

inherited and developed his thought. The question, Aristotle remarked presciently in the *Metaphysics*, is one 'which was raised of old and is raised now and always, and is always the subject of doubt'.[6] It is the question, 'what being is', which is 'just the question, what is substance?'[7] One answer that he gives, is that anything 'which is not predicated of a stratum, but of which all else is predicated' is a thing *per se* and therefore a substance (*ousia*).[8] Conversely, that which exists only by being predicated of another thing cannot be said to exist *per se*, but belongs instead to 'quantity, quality, and the other categories', a list of predicables expanded and elaborated in the *Categories*.[9] The latter depend on the former, in which they inhere, and the former can remain what they are through changes in the latter.

One is reminded of Aristotle's account when one encounters the famous 'wax example' in the second of Descartes' *Meditations*.[10] Although all of the perceived qualities of the wax undergo some change when it is heated, it in a sense remains the same wax. Aside from supporting Descartes' point in the context of that meditation that there must be an indispensable role played by the judgement of the mind in regarding the wax as identical through change, the example also illustrates Aristotle's point that, in diachronic possession of all these qualities, there is 'something definite which underlies them (i.e. the substance or individual)'.[11] Indeed, the point is a logical one. In order to predicate change of something, there must be *something* of which to predicate change.

Although Descartes is not concerned with the 'question which was raised of old' in this particular meditation, he does give his attention to it elsewhere. In fact, in the *Principles of Philosophy*, he makes a rather Aristotelian distinction between those 'items which we regard as things' and those which we regard as 'modes of things'.[12] 'By *substance*', he explains, 'we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence'.[13] However, Descartes, a devout Catholic, was also committed to the view that everything depends on God

---

[6] Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 1028b.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid. Z.3, 1029b.

[9] Ibid. Z.9, 1034b. Aristotle, *Categoriæ*, in *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. William D. Ross, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), Z.1, 1028b.

[10] Descartes, *Meditations*, pp. 20-1, AT VII.30-2.

[11] Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, Z.1, 1028a.

[12] Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I, §51, p. 210, AT VIII.24.

[13] Ibid.

for its existence, both for coming into existence and for continuing in existence. So, 'there is only one substance which can be understood to depend on no other thing whatsoever, namely God'.[14] By way of compromise, he allowed a sense in which, though something may depend for its existence on God, it need not depend on anything else:

> Hence the term "substance" does not apply *univocally*, as they say in the Schools, to God and to other things; that is, there is no distinctly intelligible meaning of the term which is common to God and his creatures.[15]

The compromise is spelled out in the French translation:

> In the case of created things, some are of such a nature that they cannot exist without other things, while some need only the ordinary concurrence of God in order to exist. We make this distinction by calling the latter "substances" and the former "qualities" or "attributes" of those substances.[16]

It is only through 'attributes', Descartes explains, that we can have any cognitive awareness of a substance at all:

> [W]e cannot initially become aware of a substance merely through its being an existing thing, since this alone does not of itself have any effect on us. We can, however, easily come to know a substance by one of its attributes, in virtue of the common notion that nothingness possesses no attributes, that is to say, no properties or qualities.[17]

Each substance, he adds, has 'one principal property [i.e. attribute] which constitutes its nature and essence'.[18] In particular, 'extension in length, breadth and depth constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance'.[19]

---

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid. AT VIII.25.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

Attributes 'proper' and 'improper'

Spinoza, too, would inherit the 'question which was raised of old' concerning substance and its predicables. Indeed, his philosophy as it is presented in the *Ethics* purports to be a comprehensive and systematic disclosure of the logical implications contained in these concepts. He was clearly under the influence of Descartes, according to whom 'nothingness possesses no attributes', when he provided an early characterisation of God in the *Short Treatise*:

> [S]ince Nothing can have no attributes, the All must have all attributes; and just as Nothing has no attributes because it is nothing, Something has attributes because it is something. So the more it is Something, the more attributes it must have. Consequently, God, being most perfect, infinite, and the Something-that-is-all, must also have infinite, perfect, and all attributes.[20]

But he was also clearly departing from his famous predecessor here, because he had eschewed the secondary, pluralist, sense of substance. Conforming more to Descartes' injunction than Descartes himself, Spinoza argued that 'if we must stop somewhere (as we must), we must stop with this unique substance':[21]

> [I]t follows that of Nature all in all is predicated, and that thus Nature consists of infinite attributes, of which each is perfect in its kind. This agrees perfectly with the definition one gives of God.[22]

Having 'spoken of what God is', Spinoza continues, 'now we shall say only a word about his attributes':[23]

> [T]hose which are known to us consist of only two, viz. thought and extension, for we are speaking here only of attributes which one could call God's *proper attributes*, through which we come to know him in himself, and not as acting outside himself.[24]

With this, he echoes Descartes' distinction between the 'principal' attributes and other, secondary, attributes through which (a) substance can be known. The former, for Descartes, disclose the very 'nature and essence' of (a) substance, and for Spinoza, they are that 'through which we come to know him in himself'.

---

[20] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, I, p. 65, note 'a'.

[21] Ibid. p. 68.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid. p. 73.

[24] Ibid. (emphasis added).

Therefore, when in the *Metaphysical Thoughts* Spinoza refers to eternity and duration as 'attributes', it can only be in the secondary, or 'improper', sense of the term. He had earlier explained why this must be the case in the *Short Treatise*:

> Everything which men ascribe to God besides these two attributes [i.e. thought and extension], must, if it does otherwise belong to him, either be an extrinsic denomination, such as existing through himself, *being eternal*, one, immutable, etc., or be in respect to his actions... These are all *propria* of God, but they do not give us any knowledge of what he is.[25]

As for the 'proper attributes', i.e. thought and extension, he follows Descartes in taking them to be that in virtue of which we are 'affected' by substance:

> It should be noted, that by affections we here understand what Descartes has elsewhere called attributes (*Principles* I, 52). For being, insofar as it is being, does not affect us by itself alone, as substance. It must, therefore, be explained by some attribute, from which, nevertheless, it is distinguished only by a distinction of reason.[26]

Thus it is perhaps because eternity and duration are not 'proper attributes', in the way that extension and thought are, that Spinoza ceased to refer to them as 'attributes' at all in the *Ethics*. But what are the 'proper attributes'?

Attributes play a precise role in Spinoza's mature metaphysics. His ontology consists of (the one and only) substance ('what is in itself and is conceived through itself') and its modes ('the affections of substance, or that which is in another').[27] But, being something rather than nothing, substance has to have some positive nature through which it is what it is, and this nature is what is meant by an attribute, i.e. 'what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence'.[28] However, 'being most perfect, infinite, and the Something-that-is-all', as Spinoza puts it in the *Short Treatise*, substance cannot be limited in any way and so it must have any positive nature that it is possible to have, for if there were some nature that it did not have, then this would be a limitation.[29] Therefore, it must have 'infinite, perfect, and all attributes'.[30]

These three metaphysical components - substance, attributes and modes - provide all the necessary ingredients for a consistent account of the 'one and the many'. That

---

[25] Ibid.

[26] Spinoza, *Metaphysical Thoughts*, I, p. 306.

[27] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1def3, 1def5.

[28] Ibid. 1def4.

[29] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, I, p. 65, note 'a'.

[30] Ibid.

is, *qua* substance, everything is one, immutable and eternal, but in virtue of its modes and attributes there is also quantitative and qualitative variety respectively. Finite modes in this ontology are the distinct individuals that populate the world, and thus account for quantitative, or numerical, variety. Attributes, on the other hand, are the most general determinations of nature, the more specific determinations of which constitute the essence or nature of particular things. The relationship between the general and specific here can be thought of as that between a determinable and its determinate. Burgundy is a determinate shade of the determinable 'red', which, in turn, is a determinate way of being the determinable 'colour'. In the same way, a particular body is a determinate configuration of the determinable 'motion and rest', which, in turn, is a determinate way (in fact, the only way) in which the determinable 'extension' is arranged. Given the attribute of extension, there exists a logical space containing all the possibilities that could be realised under it. For Spinoza, these possibilities are not 'mere' possibilities as such, but exist eternally in this essential way.

What, then, is to be made of Spinoza's characterisation of eternity and duration as 'attributes' in the *Metaphysical Thoughts*? As noted above, Spinoza is still, on the face of it, commenting on Descartes' philosophy. So perhaps it is worth hesitating before reading too much into this otherwise striking characterisation. But there are in fact further remarks - in texts where he is undoubtedly speaking *in propria persona* - that independently support the notion that there is a connection of some kind between his conception of the attributes and his conception of the species of duration and eternity. I have already quoted from the *Short Treatise*, in which he distinguishes between the 'proper attributes', such as thought and extension, and, by implication, the 'improper attributes' through which we do not know the nature, or 'whatness', but nonetheless do still know something, of God.[31] In addition to this, eternity is defined in the *Ethics* as being 'existence itself *insofar as* [*quatenus*] it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing', while duration is said to be 'existence *insofar as* [*quatenus*] it is conceived abstractly'.[32] Elsewhere there is that all-important notion of a kind of cognition that takes place 'under a certain species of eternity [*sub quadam specie æternitatis*]'.[33] Contrasted with this kind of cognition in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* is its durational counterpart,

[31] Ibid. p. 73.

[32] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1def8, 2p45s (emphasis added).

[33] Ibid. 2p44c2; Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §108.

cognition that takes place 'under a certain… duration [*sub certo… duratione*]'.[34] These last points regarding eternity and duration (and especially the significance of the adverb 'insofar as [*quatenus*]') are all reminiscent of the close relationship between the 'proper attributes' and the cognition of substance.

Spinoza inherited Descartes' understanding of attributes as being that through which there is cognitive apprehension of substance (which seems reasonable enough, given that to be aware of something, one must be aware of it *as something*, that is, as having some positive nature or other). Like attributes, which are understood in this way to be intimately involved in the possibility of cognition, eternity and duration are also presented as 'certain [*quadam*, *certo*]' ways of conceiving (or species under which to conceive) existence. In fact, so intimate is this connection in the case of the 'proper attributes' that they are defined in terms of 'what the intellect perceives of a substance'.[35] For many this has seemed to imply a kind of idealism in Spinoza's thought, which, in many ways, is a tempting interpretation. If the attributes are indeed just alternative ways of perceiving what is in itself one, immutable, and so on, then one need not worry about the further ontological problem of explaining how what is one, immutable, etc., can also objectively and in itself have all of these different natures at once. A similar rationale, only applied to eternity and duration instead of the 'proper attributes', would also seem to make sense. On this kind of reading, the different species would consist in alternative ways of apprehending the same underlying thing, something that is 'now comprehended under this species, now under that', to slightly modify one of Spinoza's well-known formulations.[36] But what are we to make of this 'idealist' reading of Spinoza's attributes, and of its possible extension to the species of eternity and duration?

---

[34] Ibid.

[35] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1def4.

[36] '[T]he thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that [*jam sub hoc, jam sub illo attributo comprehenditur*].' Ibid. 2p7s.

A false dichotomy

The so-called 'subjective-objective' debate concerning Spinoza's attributes, which one finds in the secondary literature, is an old one. The definition given at the outset of the *Ethics*, according to which an attribute is said to be 'what the intellect perceives of a substance, as [*tanquam*] constituting its essence', has appeared to the two sides of the debate to be open to two contrasting interpretations, depending on where one places the emphasis.[37] If stress is placed on 'what the intellect perceives' in the definition, then it seems as though attributes can indeed be no more than modes of thought, mere ways of perceiving that reflect no more than a subjective perspective on substance. This way of reading the definition is further reinforced by translating the ambiguous adverb *'tanquam*' as 'as if', rather than as 'as', for it can then only be *as if*, or *as though*, that which the intellect perceives of a substance does in fact constitute its essence. It also tends to favour taking the term '*intellectus*' to mean a 'finite' rather than 'infinite' intellect, since it is then more clearly a matter of how one or another individual mind perceives substance from its particular point of view. This is known as the 'subjectivist' interpretation of Spinoza's attributes. On the other hand, if the 'constituting its essence' phrase is stressed, and '*tanquam*' is rendered as 'as', then attributes seem to enjoy a far more independent status. They would have to be understood as genuinely objective features of the world, independent of any particular perspective.[38]

Before considering the merits of these rival interpretations, it is worth noting the position of Spinoza's predecessor, from whom he inherited so much of this ontological apparatus. In fact, Descartes held a kind of mixed view:

---

[37] Ibid. 1def4.

[38] For an outline of this interpretative debate, see Wolfson, *Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. I, p. 146 and *passim*. His own view is that 'the abundance of both literary and material evidence is in favour of the subjective interpretation'. But Martineau has warned of making Spinoza into a Kantian *avant la lettre*, for 'no pre-Kantian reader would have put such a construction on Spinoza's language'. Martineau, *Study of Spinoza*, p. 184. On the ambiguity in Spinoza's definition of an attribute, see Francis S. Haserot, 'Spinoza's Definition of Attribute', *Philosophical Review*, 62, no. 4 (1953), pp. 499-513. For a recent attempt to dissolve the debate by tracing it back to a false dichotomy, see Noa Shein, 'The False Dichotomy between Objective and Subjective Interpretations of Spinoza's Theory of Attributes', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 17, no. 3 (2009), pp. 505-32.

> Now some attributes or modes are in the very things of which they are said to be attributes or modes, while others are only in our thought. For example, when time is distinguished from duration taken in the general sense and called the measure of movement, it is simply a mode of thought… Yet nothing is thereby added to duration, taken in its general sense.[39]

Thus Descartes takes at least some attributes to be bona fide features of the world, independent of any apprehension of it. Nevertheless, attributes are still very closely related to human cognition for Descartes, since it is only 'through' these features of the world that there can be any cognition of a substance at all. Since Spinoza's 'attributes' correspond more to Descartes' 'principal attributes' than to their less essential, or less objective, relatives, one would expect them also to be, in Descartes' words, 'in the very things' themselves.

This indeed seems to be the case. For the 'subjectivist' interpretation would appear to have been effectively disproven by Martial Gueroult:

> [F]rom the fact that an attribute is defined as what the intellect *perceives* as constituting the essence of substance, some have thought that it expresses only that which, in the latter, is intelligible to the mind, and giving a subjective view of it, conceals from us its true nature… This is an unacceptable thesis, which doubly contradicts the Spinozist concept, rendering human understanding ontologically prior to attributes and therefore also to substance, of which it is a mode, which is absurd.[40]

The epistemological consequences are no less absurd within the context of Spinoza's philosophy, since if attributes only seem 'as though' they constitute the essence of substance, so that the nature of substance in itself is out of reach, then knowledge of substance becomes impossible, contradicting the extraordinary confidence that Spinoza clearly had in the human capacity for knowledge.[41]

But, Noa Shein has argued, opponents to this interpretation have often fallen into the inverse trap. For they, 'each in their own way, introduce an attribute-neutral structure', in order to reconcile the 'real distinction' that Spinoza says obtains between the attributes, on the one hand, with their unity in a single substance, on the other.[42] This additional metaphysical layer seems necessary to them in order to underlie the heterogeneous attributes and unify them into one and the same

---

[39] Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I, §57, p. 212, AT VIII.27.

[40] Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza*, vol. I (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1968), p. 50, translation my own. See, also, ibid. pp. 428-61.

[41] See Bennett, *Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 146. See, also, Michael De La Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 157.

[42] Shein, 'False Dichotomy', p. 521. On the 'real distinction' between the attributes, see Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p10s.

substance. But, like the 'subjectivist' interpretation, this introduces an untenable 'gap' between substance and its attributes:

> The subjectivist account, as traditionally conceived, introduces this gap by claiming that attributes are something the finite mind adds to its perception of substance. For the objectivists this gap forms when introducing a "trans-attribute" structure into the metaphysics, which they believe they are forced to do in order to maintain the "real distinction" among the attributes, on the one hand, and the unity on the other.[43]

Like so many 'subjective-objective' debates in philosophy, this too seems to be more a verbal dispute than, to risk the pun, a difference of any substance. One is reminded of Spinoza's diagnosis of a false argument between confused parties:

> And most controversies have arisen from this, that men do not rightly explain their own mind, or interpret the mind of the other man badly. For really, when they contradict one another most vehemently, they either have the same thoughts, or they are thinking of different things, so that what they think are errors and absurdities in the other are not.[44]

Both sides of this recurring debate in philosophy seem to be saying something substantially contrary to each other in virtue of a shared picture that has taken hold of the imagination. According to the picture, the objective lies on the far side of a kind of chasm, while the subjective lies on the near side. With this picture bewitching the imagination, the 'subjectivist' position in these debates feels compelled to remain modestly within the confines of the 'near side', giving the impression to the advocate of the 'objectivist' position of having closed itself off from the 'far side', and of having lost touch with objectivity. Conversely, the 'objective' position feels compelled to show in what way the goings-on of the near side are related to those of the far side, by postulating some kind of bridge between the two. However, as Shein observes in the case of interpreting Spinoza's conception of an attribute, both positions are equally guilty of introducing a questionable 'gap'.

[43] Shein, 'False Dichotomy', p. 525.

[44] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p47s.

The interpretation that I recommend is like Shein's, in that it is meant to go beyond this stalemate between subjectivist and objectivist readings, but in a way that retains the kernels of truth from which each of them began. Each attribute structures (and is structured by) the same reality, but exhibits its own character or meaning, untranslatable into that of any of the other attributes. In making 'what the intellect perceives' constitutive of what it is to be an attribute, Spinoza has built into his conception a reference to what is conceptually meaningful, given one or another of these fields of meaning, from the point of view of a suitably attuned intellect, to whomever it happens to belong. There is no loss of objectivity, since anyone inculcated into the field of meaning of, say, extension (which we as human beings typically are simply by virtue of a perceptual and cognitive makeup that has evolved in harmony with this aspect of the world), will be bound by the very same limits of meaningfulness as anyone else (in this case, the principles and laws of physics). These limits are imposed on one by the world itself. The same applies to the attribute of thought and, indeed, to any of the infinity of attributes, though Spinoza did not think that we as human beings are 'tuned in' to any attributes other than thought and extension.

This I think makes good sense of the force behind Spinoza's view that the mind and body are, *in a sense*, identical, which he presents as a radical dissolution of the Cartesian 'mind-body problem'. This aspect of his philosophy will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter, but since it illustrates rather well the interpretation being suggested it will be useful to briefly outline it here. The point behind Spinoza's mature conception of the union between mind and body is that what one is presented with is always fundamentally one and the same reality. So, looking at a human being, one can on one occasion think about (or indeed see) that person in purely physical, or physiological, terms (a convenient mode of consideration when, say, assessing a person's health). But, equally, one can, on some other occasion, think about (or see) that person as a mindful being, as manifesting intelligent (or perhaps not so intelligent) behaviour. The point is that, for Spinoza, understanding a person in either of these two ways confines one conceptually within its respective field of meaning. Therefore, contemporary hopes to the contrary, it

does not make sense to, say, reduce mindful activity to physical causes, or *vice versa* (even if neither can exist in the absence of the other):

> But these prejudices can easily be put aside by anyone who attends to the nature of thought, which does not at all involve the concept of extension. He will then understand clearly that an idea (since it is a mode of thinking) consists neither in the image of anything, nor in words. For the essence of words and of images is constituted only by corporeal motions, which do not at all involve the concept of thought.[45]

Although of course departing from Spinoza's own language, I would suggest that, at least structurally, it is something like this that is at play in his notion of an attribute: that an attribute consists in a way of understanding the world that at the same time constitutes the very essence of the world.[46] That it is of the very nature of the world that it be intelligible is a fundamental principle of Spinoza's philosophy, and one that will be explored further in the next chapter. Reflecting a more general strategy of replacing binary oppositions with his own immanently structured synthesis, Spinoza avoided a common tendency among early modern philosophers to set the existence of the world apart from our knowledge of it (generating the familiar philosophical project of building a bridge between the two), choosing instead to synthesise the ontological and the epistemological in this basic way right at the foundations of his system. The ubiquitous preoccupation with 'gaps' separating subject and object seems to arise out of a preconceived independence of the 'epistemological' from the 'ontological', whereas, for Spinoza, such preoccupations simply cannot arise, because this parent distinction is not one of 'substance', even though it is 'real' and not merely 'of reason'.[47] The expression of existence and its intelligibility (if not to this or that finite intellect, then at least to the infinite intellect) are two inseparable aspects of what it is to exist. If the nature of substance, as expressed through the 'proper' attributes, is in this intimate way a direct manifestation of substance (obviating any sceptical 'gaps'), then the expression itself, framed under one or other of the species, is as much a factor in one's cognition of it.

---

[45] Ibid. 2p49s.

[46] For two very different, yet curiously congenial, twentieth-century presentations of the view that the 'world', in the only sense in which we can understand the term, is irreducibly infused with meaning, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), and Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953).

[47] For Spinoza's catalogue of the different kinds of distinction, see his *Metaphysical Thoughts*, II, p. 323. Compare this with Descartes' earlier catalogue. Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I, §60, p. 213, AT VIII.28-9.

Therefore, as well as applying to the 'proper' attributes, I would suggest extending this interpretation to the 'improper' attributes of eternity and duration. Of course, in the *Ethics*, these features of reality are not called 'attributes' at all, but their analogous characterisation in terms of 'existence insofar as it is conceived' suggests a significance that is at least structurally related to that of the attributes of thought and extension. If existence is the expression of something, and that something is of such-and-such a nature or essence, I would suggest that, whereas the 'proper' attributes, such as thought or extension, constitute the latter, the 'improper' attributes of eternity and duration constitute the former, i.e., the very expression of that which is expressed.

Spinoza appreciated as much as Descartes before him that thought and extension are conceptually independent. But, because he conformed to Descartes' definition of 'substance' more closely than Descartes himself, he could not, like the famous Frenchman, reify this conceptual independence into a distinction at the level of substance. Although Spinoza, like Descartes, held that 'two attributes may be conceived to be really distinct', he did not allow that we can 'infer from that that they constitute two beings, or two different substances'.[48] Therefore, Spinoza's conception of a 'real distinction' is, in an important way, different from Descartes'.[49] What is ultimately constitutive of Spinoza's 'real distinction', I suggested above, is a variance in the respective conceptual physiognomy of the various attributes, which are to be thought of as fields of meaning, each shaped, and immanently shaping, concrete practical situations in the world. Each is as concretely objective as can be, but each also irreducibly infused with meaning (and so also with its correlate, the understanding, or (infinite) intellect).

'Improper attributes': The 'species' of eternity and duration

Thus, the interpretation above would seem to apply *mutatis mutandis* to the 'improper' attributes, or species, of eternity and duration. As with his definition of an attribute, Spinoza builds into his characterisations of eternity and duration a reference to the intellect, and so the reasons adduced in favour of interpreting the attributes as fields

[48] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p10s.

[49] See Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I, §60, p. 213, AT VIII.28-9.

of meaning apply here also. But the similarity between the two is only partial. Whereas the 'proper' attributes together constitute the 'essence' of substance, eternity and duration are not aspects under which the nature of substance is known. As he puts it in the *Metaphysical Thoughts*, the essence of substance is its 'whatness', whereas eternity and (one can infer by extension) duration are aspects under which the 'thatness' of substance is grasped. Eternity is 'existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing'.[50] It is thus an aspect under which existence is understood to follow from the very nature or essence of the thing, a way of apprehending the existence of something that sees it as an autonomous expression of that thing's true nature. Duration, on the other hand, is to be understood in a contrastive way. It is a way of understanding the 'thatness' of something, not as flowing from 'within' the thing in question, but as coming about through a confluence of external circumstances and conditions. It is existence conceived as 'contingent', mediated by an incidentally favourable time and place, which, because '[i]n nature there is nothing contingent', can only amount to 'existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly'.[51] Thus, built into the difference between the two species of eternity and duration, is an epistemological valuation. Duration, *qua* mode of cognition, pertains to a metaphysically misleading modality, and *qua* mode of expression, it pertains to a 'superficial' kind of existence (until subsumed by a conception of things under an eternal aspect (*qua* cognition), and enfolded by a more authentic kind of existence, (*qua* expression)).

So whereas the 'proper' attributes of extension and thought are infinite only 'in their own kind' (because 'we can conceive infinite attributes which do not pertain to [their] nature'), eternity and duration do not exclude other 'determinable essences' of substance from their field of meaning, for they are not themselves essences at all.[52] Instead, these aspects under which things are apprehended reflect a way of standing in relation to the essence, or 'whatness', of substance. The two kinds of field map orthogonally on to each other, forming a matrix, not at the expense of, but complementary to, each other, each providing a necessary dimension for the determination of the existence of substance, or, in Aristotle's words, 'that which is'. Both attributes 'proper' and the species of eternity and duration, however, involve a relation to the intellect, which carries important implications, both epistemological

[50] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1def8.

[51] Ibid. 1p29, 2p45s.

[52] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1def6.

and ontological. It is under the attributes of extension and thought that there can be cognition of the essence or nature of things, while it is under the species of eternity and duration that there can be cognition of a thing's existence, whether that is apprehended as necessary (which it is) or taken to be contingent (which it is not). Ontologically, each of these categories expresses its own dimension of existence, and in grasping this for what it is the knower's ontological status is transformed as well. Conceiving things *sub specie æternitatis* is, for Spinoza, not only a higher form of cognition, but a higher manner of existence.

These implications will be explored further in Chapter 5, which focuses on Spinoza's account of human cognition. But prior to the topic of human cognition, in both the order of priority and that of Spinoza's own exposition in the *Ethics*, is the question of what it is that cognises, that is, the question of the 'Nature and Origin of the Mind' (the title of *Ethics* II), and so it is to this question I now turn.

Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at midday,
in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek
you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea,
no more to rise fore ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists!

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

Chapter 4

Mind and Body

Spinoza came to understand the mind as bound together with the body in the most intimate of ways, so his views on the mind could not easily be addressed in isolation from this context. Therefore, this chapter will be concerned jointly with both of these inextricable notions - mind and body.[1] Whether or not it was true of his 'order of discovery', it was Spinoza's contention that in the order of nature, whose systematic disclosure he aimed to present in the *Ethics*, it is 'metaphysics, and knowledge of this [that] must always come first').[2] If this is true of anything in his philosophy, it is certainly true of his philosophy of mind. For, in Spinoza's system, the nature of the human mind consists in a particular instantiation of the more general metaphysical nature of thought, understood as one among an infinity of attributes, which together express the 'eternal and infinite essence' of God or Nature.[3] The same thing is true of the human body, which likewise consists in a particular instantiation of extension, another of God's infinity of attributes. Therefore, I will approach Spinoza's conception of mind and body via his metaphysics of thought and extension. But, in light of the observation made in Chapter 2, that the allusions in the *Short Treatise* to a more dualistically construed eschatology appear to reflect the lingering presence of a more or less Cartesian

[1] As Wolfson puts it: 'This must be considered the essential point in Spinoza's theory of the mind - its inseparability from the body. It runs counter to the entire trend of the history of philosophy down to his time, for everybody before him, for diverse reasons, insisted upon the separability of mind from body.' Even if his second claim here is somewhat strong, the first is surely right. Wolfson, *Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. II, p. 53.

[2] Letter 27; Spinoza, *The Letters*, p. 177. Wolfson, pointedly, refers to Spinoza's 'literary pretension that his entire philosophy was evolved from his conception of God'. Wolfson, *Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. II, p. 4.

[3] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1def6.

conception of mind and body, the reconstruction in this chapter will also proceed genetically, with the aim of bringing into relief its gradual evolution from its earlier incarnation in the *Short Treatise* to its eventual culmination in the *Ethics*, and the role it plays there in the doctrine of the eternity of the mind.

The 'idea of the body'

If Spinoza's conception of mind and body underwent a certain metamorphosis between the earlier stages of his thought and the mature position reached in the *Ethics*, it nevertheless retained through all these changes a curious yet persistent character, expressed in his definition of the mind as the 'idea of the body'. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza explains that 'the essence of the soul [*ziel*] consists only in the being of an Idea, or objective essence, in the thinking attribute', the object (*voorwerp*) of which is the body (*lighaam*).[4] This is echoed in the *Ethics*, in which it is proven that the 'object [*objectus*] of the idea constituting the human Mind [*mens*] is the Body [*corpus*]'.[5] Two questions arise at this point. Firstly, what does Spinoza mean by glossing the familiar term 'idea' with the less familiar term 'objective essence'? And, secondly, to *whom* does such an idea belong? These two questions may seem to pull in opposing directions. For an answer to the first question might seem to point towards a representative quality inherent in the nature of an idea, suggesting a specifically epistemological sense of the term that had recently been popularised by Descartes, whereas, if one accepts this natural answer to the first question, then it seems that an answer to the second must refer to someone or other who, in this epistemological sense, *has* an idea of the relevant body. But the claim that, for every body there is an idea or 'objective essence' expressed 'in the thinking attribute', seems intended to prescind from the various particular apprehensions that this or that person might have of a particular body.

Whether or not this assimilation of two different senses of the term amounts to an illegitimate conflation is perhaps a question that strikes at the very heart of Spinoza's philosophy of mind. One might object that, despite conjuring up the effect of having synthesised the epistemological and ontological aspects of his system in a

[4] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, Appendix II, p. 154.

[5] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p13.

single stroke, this mixed-use of the term 'idea' can only amount to a double entendre, incapable, unfortunately, of harmonising into a unified concept. Such is the conclusion, for example, of one of Spinoza's otherwise charitable interpreters, Pollock, who takes the equivocation to be, not only specious in itself, but also the source of so many of the puzzles that beset Spinoza's philosophy. 'The blending, logically not to be justified, of the two meanings of *idea*', he says, 'seems to give us the key to some of the difficulties we must hereafter face in the *Ethics*'.[6] In order to address this criticism, I will venture a response to each of the two questions from which it arose. I will answer the first by tracing in outline the historical origins of the terms, 'idea' and 'objective essence', against the background of which I will explain Spinoza's specific employment of them. My response to the second question will draw on this same historical background in order to show how the two apparently conflicting threads have been fused together in Spinoza's account.

Meaning something like 'what one sees' or 'appearance' in Homer's epics, the ancient Greek term '*eidos*' later came to be associated with a thing's characteristic property or type, and was used, for example, in fifth-century medical circles, to refer to the unseen cause of a disease. This sense of a thing's 'constitutive nature' which remains nevertheless distinct from its outward appearance was therefore already established when Plato set about giving a metaphysical account of the *eide* as the fixed, intellectual (non-sensible) archetypes that are instantiated to varying degrees within the changing, fluctuating world of sensation, which he thought necessary if genuine knowledge (which must be fixed and stable) is to be possible.[7] Aristotle, too, incorporated this notion of a thing's characteristic 'form' into his ontological framework, but as the necessary complement to bare, shapeless matter in his form/matter dichotomy. Where Aristotle differed from Plato was in construing the *eide* as immanently informing this prime matter, as opposed to having an independent, transcendent existence apart from (and ontologically prior to) the sensible world. Complementing this 'hylomorphic' framework, Aristotle also formulated an influential theory of human cognition, whereby the 'thinking part of the soul must… be, while impassible, capable of receiving the form of an object; that is, must be potentially identical in character with its object without being the

[6] Pollock, *Spinoza*, p. 134.

[7] On the use of this term by ancient Greek philosophers, see Francis E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (London: University of London Press, 1967), p. 46 and *passim*.

object'.[8] Plato's theory would later prove conducive to Christian theology, in which the transcendent *eide* could be identified with God's creative - and transcendent – 'plans' for things with which to populate the world.[9] When Aquinas subsequently incorporated Aristotle's theory of human cognition into the picture, the result was a curious hybrid of both.[10]

It was in conscious allusion to the Christian appropriation of the term '*eidos*', which had been rendered '*idea*' in Latin, that Descartes explained his use of the term with respect to human cognition: '*Idea*. I understand this term to mean the form of any given thought, immediate perception of which makes me aware of the thought.'[11] As he explained to Hobbes, 'I used the word "idea" because it was the standard philosophical term used to refer to the forms of perception belonging to the divine mind'.[12] But in availing himself of the sense in which ideas give 'form [*forme*]' to the mind, and in such a way that ideas involve 'objectively' the existence of that of which they are ideas, he was also clearly harking back to the Aristotelian theory of cognition that Aquinas had integrated into the Christian account of *ideæ Dei*.[13] However, although Descartes alluded to this essentially Aristotelian principle of human cognition (modifying it for his own purposes), he did not of course wish to reintroduce the old hylomorphic metaphysics (and physics) he had otherwise worked so ardently to oppose. He makes, therefore, no use of the term '*idea*' in that more general sense of an object's 'form'. Spinoza, on the other hand, would inherit the more selective use of the term as developed by Descartes, but he would also

---

[8] Aristotle, *De Anima*, in *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. III, ed. and trans. William D. Ross, vol. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 429a.

[9] '*Quod si hae rerum omnium creandarum creatarumque diuina mente continentur… atque has rationes rerum principales appellat ideas Plato, non solum sunt ideæ, sed ipsæ ueræ sunt, quia æternæ sunt et eiusdem modi atque incommutabiles manent* [For if these creative reasons of all created things are contained in the divine mind, and these principal reasons of things Plato calls ideas, then not only are they ideas, but they themselves are true, because they are eternal and remain unchangeable].' St. Augustine, *De Diversis Quæstionibus*, ed. Almut Mutzenbecher (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975), XLVI, pp. 72-3, translation my own.

[10] 'It is necessary to suppose ideas in the divine mind... either to be the type of that of which it is called the form, or to be the principle of the knowledge of that thing.' Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. and trans. the Dominican Fathers (London: Blackfriars, 1963), I, q. 15, art. 1.

[11] Descartes, *Meditations,* 'Replies to Second Set of Objections', p. 113, AT VII.160.

[12] Ibid. 'Replies to Third Set of Objections', p. 127, AT VII.181.

[13] The question of Descartes' sources is an interesting trail for any curious detective to follow. Although his immediate sources almost certainly included more recent scholastics, such as Francisco Suarez, Eustachius a Sancto Paulo, and Abra de Raconis, he had also been, since his school days at the Jesuit college La Fléche, well versed in the writings of Aquinas (the officially decreed authority in philosophical and theological matters for Jesuits). See, for example, Ètienne Gilson, *Index scolastico-cartésien* (Paris: Fèlix Alcan, 1913); Roland Dalbiez, 'Les sources scolastiques de la théorie cartésienne de l'être objectif. À propos de M. Gilson', *Revue d'Histoire de la Philosophie*, 3 (1929); Timothy J. Cronin, *Objective Being in Descartes and in Suarez* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1966).

effectively reunite it with its original hylomorphic connotations. He did so by defining an idea as 'a concept of the Mind that the Mind forms because it is a thinking thing', while allocating an idea in God's mind for each thing that exists: 'In God there is necessarily an idea, both of his essence and of everything that necessarily follows from his essence'.[14] What enabled him to synthesise these two pictures so seamlessly was that, for him, God's mind consists of the totality of ideas that immanently (as opposed to transcendentally) express the 'objective essence' of each thing, even though, under the attribute of extension, things conceived materially could still be quantified in the way that the new mathematical alternative to Aristotle's (qualitative) physics required.

In the same way, it is instructive to compare Spinoza's notion of 'objective essence' with this Cartesian and scholastic background. As with the term 'idea', Descartes was indebted to the tradition for his appropriation of the distinction between 'objective' and 'formal' reality:[15]

> The nature of an idea is such that of itself it requires no formal reality except what it derives from my thought, of which it is a mode. But in order for a given idea to contain such and such objective reality, it must surely derive it from some cause which contains at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea.[16]

This is to endorse the Aristotelian view that human thought must, in some way, be 'capable of receiving the form of an object; that is, must be potentially identical in character with its object without being the object.'[17] The 'formal reality' of a thing refers to its existence as it is in itself, whether the thing is an idea (a mode of thought), something corporeal (a mode of extension), or anything else. In addition to having 'formal reality', however, it is a special quality peculiar to the nature of ideas that they involve 'objectively' the existence of that of which they are ideas, that is, it belongs to their nature to (re-)present their objects as those objects themselves exist 'formally':

---

[14] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2def3, 2p3.

[15] Descartes at times makes this same distinction, but between 'objective' and 'formal' *being*. See, for example, Descartes, *Meditations*, 'Replies to First Set of Objections', pp. 74-5.

[16] Ibid. pp. 28-9, AT VII.41.

[17] Aristotle, *De Anima*, 429a.

> By this I mean that the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect - not of course formally existing, as it does in the heavens, but objectively existing, i.e. in the way in which objects normally are in the intellect.[18]

Siding this time with the scholastics who had followed Scotus rather than Aquinas on this particular point (such as Eustachius a Sancto Paulo and Abra de Raconis), Descartes explains that even though this 'objective reality' is 'of course much less perfect than that possessed by things which exist outside the intellect… it is not therefore simply nothing'.[19] That is, the manner in which a thing is (re-)presented in thought is not itself a mere 'being of reason', as Aquinas had held, but is itself a genuine reality, as Scotus had urged (and, therefore, according to Descartes, as much in need of an efficient cause as anything 'formally' real).

'Formal' and 'objective' essence

Against this background, Spinoza developed his own version of the distinction between the 'formal [*formalis*]' and the 'objective [*obiective*]' in relation to ideas, introducing at least two important modifications. Firstly, in place of 'reality' (or 'being'), Spinoza applies the distinction a thing's 'essence [*essentia*]', defined as 'that which, being given, the thing is [NS: also] necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily [NS: also] taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing'.[20] Secondly, whereas Descartes takes the 'objective reality' involved in an idea to represent a thing outside the mind, so that there arises a concern as to how it can be known whether or not that which is represented does in fact match up with the way it is being represented, for Spinoza the 'objective essence' of a thing simply is the very thing itself, immediately present (as opposed to only *re*presented) to the mind, so that no such sceptical anxiety can arise. 'Certainty', Spinoza explains in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, 'is nothing but the objective essence itself, i.e.,

[18] Descartes, *Meditations*, 'Replies to First Set of Objections', p. 75, AT VII.102.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2def2.

the mode by which we are aware of the formal essence is certainty itself'.[21] This 'direct', that is, unmediated, account of cognition is reiterated in the *Ethics*:

> [A]s to the last, viz. how a man can know that he has an idea that agrees with its object? …[T]his arises solely from his having an idea that does agree with its object – *or* that truth is its own standard. Add to this that out Mind, insofar as it perceives things truly, is part of the infinite intellect of God.[22]
>
> What can there be which is clearer and more certain than a true idea, to serve as a standard of truth? As the light makes both itself and the darkness plain, so truth is the standard both of itself and of the false.[23]

Aside from these innovations, the underlying distinction remained that of the tradition:

> Peter, for example, is something real; but a true idea of Peter is an objective essence of Peter, and something real in itself, and altogether different from Peter himself. So since an idea of Peter is something real, having its own particular essence, it will also be something intelligible, i.e., the object of a second idea, which will have in itself, objectively, whatever the idea of Peter has formally.[24]

Having identified the origins of Spinoza's use of the term 'objective essence', and having noted the key modifications in virtue of which it differs from its antecedents, the second question can now be addressed, i.e., 'to whom do these ideas, or "objective essences", belong?' Continuing the example of 'a true idea of Peter' (which, being an immediate presentation of Peter himself, is self-certifying), Spinoza adds that '[e]veryone can experience this, when he sees that he knows what Peter is, and also knows that he knows, and again, knows that he knows that he knows, etc.'[25] As well as reiterating the way in which Peter is immediately present to someone who knows him (i.e., that 'certainty and an objective essence are the same thing'), this clearly indicates that Spinoza is talking about the 'idea' or 'objective essence' that some particular person might have of Peter.[26] But if the mind is the idea of the body, then does that mean that Peter's mind is somehow only instantiated in virtue of the idea of his body formed by this or that particular person? Would it mean that, at those times when nobody happens to be having an idea of Peter's body, Peter's

---

[21] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §35.

[22] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p43s.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §34.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid. §35.

mind simply does not exist? The sense in which, for every body there is an idea or 'objective essence' in 'the thinking attribute', which constitutes the mind correlated with that body, is clearly intended to prescind from the various particular apprehensions that this or that person might have of the body in question. It is in this way that the two questions raised earlier seem to pull in opposing directions. For, in explaining what is meant by 'objective essence', Spinoza alludes to the more specifically epistemological relationship between some particular person and the object of their cognition, as in Descartes' picture: 'Everyone can experience this, when he sees that he knows what Peter is, etc.'[27] Yet, in order for the 'objective essence' of a person's body to constitute that person's mind, it seems necessary that it prescind from any particular act(s) of cognition.

The means for resolving this apparent tension are furnished by the innovations in Spinoza's particular application of the notion of 'objective essence'. As noted above, Descartes' notion of 'objective reality' applies to an idea as it exists in the mind of the person who has it, inviting the question whether that which the idea represents, i.e., that which the idea involves 'objectively', does in fact match up with the represented object. For Descartes, the 'objective reality' involved in an idea of the sun is indeed the sun itself, but only *insofar* as it exists 'in the intellect… i.e. in the way in which objects normally are in the intellect'.[28] For Spinoza, on the other hand, a thing's 'objective essence' belongs to the thing itself, whether that thing is an idea (a modification of thought), something corporeal (a modification of extension), or something made up of both (such as Peter). It is simply that thing itself insofar as it is an object capable of being thought, that is, insofar as it is intelligible. That absolutely everything *is* intelligible, for Spinoza, is a fundamental result proven in the first proposition of *Ethics* II: 'Thought is an attribute of God, or God is a thinking thing'.[29] For that which can be thought is intelligible, and thought is an essential characteristic of God or Nature, therefore all of God or Nature is intelligible. The objective essence of Peter, then, is Peter himself, *insofar* as he is intelligible or knowable to others (and not *in fact* known by this or that particular person). It is an immediate and publicly available presentation of Peter to anyone who gets to know him. Joachim expresses this most clearly:

---

[27] Ibid. §34.

[28] Descartes, *Meditations*, 'Replies to First Set of Objections', p. 75, AT VII.102.

[29] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p1.

> On the one hand, then, a true idea is other than, and "quite different from", its *ideatum*; and yet, on the other hand, they are inseparably united, and their union is, in a certain sense, identity... This two-sided identity, this single something with a duality of aspects, is the "essence" or "what". *On one side of itself*, Peter's essence constitutes his "form". It is his "formal essence", or what he *really* is. But Peter, precisely in respect to what he *really* is, is also *intelligible* - i.e. the possible object of a "true idea" or knowledge. *On its other side*, therefore, Peter's "essence" is what he is ideally (*objective*), what he is "in the true idea of him". Peter's *essentia objective* (as Spinoza calls it) is what Peter is truly conceived, or known, to be.[30]

The resulting picture is therefore an interesting fusion of prior traditions. As in the Christian tradition, there is in God's infinite intellect 'an idea, both of his essence and of everything that necessarily follows from his essence'.[31] However, unlike this tradition, Spinoza's *ideæ Dei* are not the transcendent archetypes for a fluctuating, sensible world in which we enjoy our limited existence, but are rather the immanent expression, under the attribute of thought, of the intelligibility of things. This immanent intelligibility with which things are informed is therefore also reminiscent of Aristotle's hylomorphism, albeit without the need to relinquish the recent paradigm of quantitative (as opposed to qualitative) scientific analysis, which can simply be delegated to the attribute of extension, a level of explanation conceptually independent of thought.[32] In answer to the second question raised above, therefore, the answer must, in the first instance, be that it is God to whom these ideas, or objective essences, belong. But, as we have seen, this is not in conflict with the answer to the first question, which is framed in terms of an idea, or objective essence, that this or that particular person might have of something. The two answers are complementary in Spinoza's picture because, to say that there is an idea of a thing in God's mind, just is to say that the thing is intelligible, or capable of being thought by this or that particular person. This is possible, because in knowing, or having a true idea of something, one does not have a private representation of it, but knows it directly as it is itself. A true idea does not therefore belong to anyone in particular, but is rather a publicly available idea, shared, to varying degrees, by everyone. There is nothing mysterious about this, given the distinction between objective and formal essence. For a thing's objective essence is publicly accessible, even if that which enables its apprehension by this or that particular mind is the

[30] Joachim, *Spinoza's Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), p. 55.

[31] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p3.

[32] Ibid. 1p10, 2p49s.

formal essence of an idea, which is a constituent mode of thought within the complex idea of that particular person's body, that is, within his or her mind.[33] My mind is the 'true idea' of my body, but, being a publicly available idea (as opposed to the incorrigible preserve of a private ego), I am required as much as anyone else to seek to understand it, even though, being embodied in its object, I am peculiarly well-placed to do so.[34] So, for Spinoza, there is a very real sense in which 'who we are' is determined by how we are known (or, at least, how we are *knowable*) by others (as well as by ourselves). Pollock's criticism, quoted above, can therefore be deflected as not having taken account of the role played by Spinoza's reinterpretation of the 'formal' and 'objective' with respect to ideas.

Having assuaged the worry that Spinoza was conflating two different senses of the term 'idea' in his definition of the mind (or soul), his specific formulations of that definition can now be recounted. In both earlier and later works, Spinoza begins with a certain schema of human nature. In the supplement to the *Short Treatise* entitled 'Of the Human Soul [*Van de Menschelyke Ziel*]', he first considers the nature of a human being *qua* 'created, finite, thing [*geschapen eyndige zaak*]', which he takes to consist in both thinking and extended aspects.[35] Since human nature is finite (*eyndige*), these aspects could be no more than modifications (*wijzen*) of those infinite attributes of substance called 'thought' and 'extension' respectively.[36] This pattern is repeated in the *Ethics*, in which the nature of a human being is set out axiomatically in the preliminaries of Part II: 'Man thinks'; 'We feel that a certain body is affected in many ways'.[37] Here too, the essentially modal character of human existence is stressed.[38] In both texts, the nature of thought is said to be such that it expresses 'objectively' the essence of everything that exists. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza

[33] Spinoza's discussion of the 'difference between the idea of, say, Peter, which constitutes the essence of Peter's mind, and the idea of Peter which is in another man, say, in Paul', at (2p17s), takes place within the context of an account of 'the affections of the human body whose ideas [re-]present external bodies as present to us', which he calls the 'images of things (*rerum imagines*)... imagined (*imaginari*)' by the mind. Interestingly, Curley translates *'quarum ideæ corpora externa velut nobis præsentia repræsentant*' here as 'whose ideas present external bodies as present to us', despite Spinoza's use of '*repræsentant*' instead of '*præsentant*'. Although Curley's translation would seem to bolster the kind of 'direct' account of cognition that I have ascribed to Spinoza, that account is not in fact compromised by this passage and its talk of 'representation', since it is concerned specifically with the level of affective cognition, *imaginatio*, anyway, which is, as will be seen in the next chapter, liable to 'indicate the condition of our own body more than the nature of the external bodies' (Ibid. 2p16c2).

[34] Ibid. 2p23.

[35] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, Appendix II, p. 152.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2a2, 2a4.

[38] Ibid. 2a1, p10.

articulates this by stating that 'it is necessary that... there is produced in thought an infinite Idea, which contains in itself objectively [*voorwerpelyk*] the whole of Nature, as it is in itself'.[39] Similarly, in the *Ethics*, it is proven that '[i]n God there is necessarily an idea, both of his essence and of everything that necessarily follows from his essence'.[40] He concludes, in the *Short Treatise*, that what 'man... has of thought, and what we call the soul', is 'an Idea arising from an object which exists in Nature'.[41] Because the other aspect of human nature is furnished by a mode of extension, this 'object' consists in 'a certain proportion of motion and rest'.[42] 'So this existing proportion's objective essence in the thinking attribute is the soul of the body.'[43] Similarly, in the *Ethics*, because 'the essence of man (by p10c) is constituted by certain modes of God's attributes, viz. (by a2) by modes of thinking... the first thing that constitutes the actual being of a human Mind is the idea of a singular thing which actually exists'.[44] Since '[w]e feel that a certain body is affected in many ways', this 'singular thing' is none other than the human body.[45] 'Therefore, the object of the idea that constitutes the human Mind is the Body, and it actually exists'.[46]

A speculative 'geology' for an evolving conception

But if the definition of the mind (or soul) as the 'idea of the body' remained constant through Spinoza's successive writings, his overall conception of mind and body underwent an important transformation in the interim between the *Short Treatise* and the *Ethics*. As noted in Chapter 2, this development appears to be correlated with a corresponding change in his eschatological views, from an earlier phase in which the first hints of a realised, this-life, construal of eternal life are muddled together with a more dualistic picture of the separate survival of the soul, into a mature phase in which these more orthodox, supernatural, elements have been

[39] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, Appendix II, p. 153.
[40] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p3.
[41] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, Appendix II, pp. 152, 155.
[42] Ibid. p. 155.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p11dem.
[45] Ibid. 2a4.
[46] Ibid. 2p13dem.

more fully subverted. Therefore, before turning to examine the celebrated 'parallelism' of the *Ethics*, it will be apposite to the aim of this dissertation to trace the origins of that thesis to its younger precursors in the *Short Treatise*. However, owing to the curious nature of the text, this search for earlier versions of Spinoza's conception of mind and body will have to invite a more or less speculative geological excavation.

The *Short Treatise* was not discovered until the nineteenth century, after mention of it in a separate document indicated where two manuscript copies might be found, which in a dream discovery for any scholar they soon enough were. The manuscripts that were found were copies of a work that was possibly written as early as 1658-1660, or if Mignini is correct, between 1661-1662. It seems to have been intended solely for circulation among friends, as the closing word of caution suggests:

> To bring this all to an end, it remains only for me to say to the friends to whom I write this... as you are aware of the character of the age in which we live, I would ask you urgently to be very careful about communicating these things to others.[47]

An unfinished work-in-progress, it consists almost in a kind of montage of staggered amendments and marginalia. For this reason, as Curley puts it, the text 'bristles with difficulties... inconsistencies, repetitions, and expressions of uncertainty about whether particular topics would be treated later'.[48] In the past, these difficulties led to the text earning a problematic status, with scholars like Jacob Freudenthal warning that it was corrupt and should perhaps be dismissed as the bumbling efforts of an inept student or follower of Spinoza.[49] Since then there has emerged more of a consensus that Spinoza is indeed the author, and that the text, albeit diachronic and at times conflicted, can nonetheless reward careful study.[50]

The palimpsestic quality of the text means that it contains a stratification of differently dated passages interspersed among one another, and this peculiar character is especially vivid in the work's mercurial treatment of the relationship between soul (*ziel*) and body (*lighaam*). The early twentieth-century scholar, Abraham Wolf, put this suggestively:

---

[47] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 150.

[48] Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I, p. 47.

[49] Jacob Freudenthal, 'Spinozastudien', *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik,* 108 (1896), pp. 238-82.

[50] Filippo Mignini, 'Un documento trascurato della revisione spinoziana del Breve Trattato', *La Cultura*, 18 (1980), pp. 223-73.

> As it is, we seem to have here several different views on the relation between mind [or soul] and body. And as we have no independent knowledge of the chronological orders, or of the geological formation (so to say) of the parts of the *Treatise*, it is impossible to speak with absolute confidence of the actual order or sequence among these views.[51]

Without independent evidence for the chronological sequence in which these various conceptions found their way into the work, any theories advanced in that capacity must remain more or less speculative. However, notwithstanding this hypothetical character, there is at least one obvious heuristic principle with which to approach the question, as Wolf pointed out:

> It seems reasonable... to suppose that their [i.e., the various conceptions'] logical order is also more or less representative of their chronological sequence. His final view, we take it, was what has since become familiar as that of psycho-physical parallelism. This view is the one adopted in the *Ethics*, though with occasional lapses. The other views may be regarded as leading up to this one.[52]

With the aim of tracing the evolution of this conception over the course of Spinoza's intellectual development, I will take up the suggestion made by Wolf, and attempt an excavation of these 'geological' layers deposited in the *Short Treatise*.

If the eventual result is agreed to be the 'psycho-physical parallelism' of the *Ethics*, then what was the initial starting point, prior even to the phases traversed in the *Short Treatise*? There are not enough clues in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* on the basis of which to reconstruct an earlier conception of mind, even though some conception clearly is presupposed, since the work is predominantly concerned with the powers of the mind. On the other hand, the earliest letters that we have date to 1661, that is, to around the time when the *Short Treatise* was already in composition. In lieu of any such evidence, a conjecture might again be ventured. Knowing the philosophy of Descartes to have partly shaped Spinoza's early ideas and vocabulary (even if only so far as to be turned around and used against their purveyor), a possible candidate for this germinal conception could be something that Spinoza may have taken from Descartes. This conjecture need not even be true in order to serve its heuristic role. For it need not be true that Spinoza ever actually

[51] Abraham Wolf, *Spinoza's Short Treatise on God, Man & his Well-Being* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1910), p. 227.

[52] Ibid.

subscribed to any Cartesian orthodoxy on the mind and body in order for such a position to nonetheless serve as the imaginary origin of a timeline terminating with the parallelism of the *Ethics*. The idea is that the various conceptions of soul and body deposited in the *Short Treatise* might be situated along this timeline, such that those that are logically further from the Cartesian origin might also be taken to be correspondingly later in the chronological order of the work's composition.

Even the logically 'oldest' of the strata will show some departure from the Cartesian position, for Spinoza had already replaced Descartes' substance pluralism with his own monism: '[I]f we must stop somewhere (as we must), we must stop with this unique substance.'[53] Thus, nowhere in the *Short Treatise* does Spinoza advocate the full-blown Cartesian doctrine of an immaterial substance interacting with a material substance. Nevertheless, there are remarks that explicitly or implicitly imply a causal influence in one or the other direction between mind and body, without any indication that Spinoza found this problematic. Of the influence that the body exerts on the mind, it is said, for example, that 'there is in Nature a body by whose form and actions we are affected, so that we perceive it', that 'the Soul is an Idea... in the thinking thing, arising from the existence of a thing which is in Nature', whose 'duration and change', are determined by 'the duration and change of the thing [in Nature]', such that, as 'one of these [bodily] modes (motion or rest) changes, either by increasing or by decreasing, the Idea also changes... [such that] if the rest happens to increase, and the motion to decrease, the pain or sadness we call *cold* is thereby produced... [or] if this [increase] occurs in the motion, then the pain we call *heat* is thereby produced'.[54] It seems that, at this stage at least, Spinoza did not consider the issue of mind-body interaction to be particularly problematic. As such, it perhaps reflects an earlier stage of his thought, predating a revision of the conception under the pressure of a growing anxiety that something about it was not quite right. Perhaps it seemed to him, in this earlier phase, as though the issue should no longer pose a problem, as it had for Descartes and his interlocutors, precisely because he had replaced his predecessor's substance pluralism with his own monism, since there ought no longer to be any mystery about how a material substance could interact with an immaterial one. Despite this initial confidence, however, Spinoza

[53] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, I, p. 68.

[54] Ibid. II, pp. 130, 140; Appendix II, p. 155.

would come to agonise over the question, and would borrow, tellingly, from Descartes' strategy for dealing with it.

Availing himself of the old Galenic theory of 'animal spirits', according to which neural stimuli and responses are mediated by a kind of invisible or immaterial '*pneuma*' ('wind,' or 'breath'), Descartes had taken the conduction of these spirits in the pineal gland to serve as a kind of plausible intermediary in the exchanges between immaterial soul and material body:

> The parts of the blood which penetrate as far as the brain serve not only to nourish and sustain its substance, but also and primarily to produce in it a certain very fine wind [*vent très subtil*], or rather a very lively and pure flame, which is called the *animal spirits*. For it must be noted that the arteries which carry blood to the brain from the heart, after dividing into countless tiny branches… come together again around a certain little *gland* situated near the middle of the substance of the brain.[55]

The anatomical location, uniqueness and delicacy of the pineal gland all seemed to suggest to Descartes that this was the likely site of exchange between the material and the immaterial:

> [T]he part of the body in which the soul directly exercises its functions is not the heart at all, or the whole of the brain. It is rather the innermost part of the brain, which is a certain very small gland situated in the middle of the brain's substance… The slightest movements on the part of this gland may alter very greatly the course of these spirits, and conversely any change, however slight, taking place in the course of the spirits may do much to change the movements of the gland.[56]

His account seemed, at least, to accommodate the principle that the total quantity of motion and rest in the universe should remain constant, which would otherwise be compromised by an anomalous generation of motion (or reduction in rest) caused by the action of an immaterial will on the body, or by an equally anomalous disappearance of motion (or increase in rest) caused by the body acting on the mind. It could now be held that, far from affecting the quantity of motion and rest in the universe, mind-body interaction proceeds by changing the course or reversing the direction of the animal spirits, via the pineal gland, preserving the constant overall quantity of motion and rest. However, even if this principle is better accommodated by such an account, the original problem remains unsolved. For despite their diaphanous and '*subtil*' nature, Descartes' 'animal spirits' are still ultimately material

[55] Descartes, *Treatise on Man*, AT XI.129. Translation from CSM, vol. I, p. 100.

[56] Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, AT XI.352. Translation from CSM, vol. I, p. 340.

(unlike classic formulations of the theory), as is the pineal gland, so it is not clear why he thought that describing their mechanism stole any kind of march on the original problem concerning material-*immaterial* interaction. Perhaps he allowed his imagination (or a vague awareness of the original, immaterial, sense of 'animal spirits') to lead him to entertain a kind of matter that was of such great subtlety as to be neither fully material nor immaterial, but somehow in between so as to offer a possible bridge between the two.

Whatever Descartes' reasons, Spinoza would find himself following in the famous philosopher's footsteps in order to render the interaction between mind and body more tractable. It seems that he felt the need to do so in light of the growing recognition that the problem of interaction was one that carried over to his own metaphysics of attributes, since it is no less mysterious how an attribute, immutable and infinite in its own kind, could affect or be affected by another attribute, itself immutable and infinite in its own kind, and hence of a completely different, and incommensurable, nature. Amid this layer of the stratified deposits in the *Short Treatise*, one finds Spinoza's attempts to carefully separate the heterogeneous attributes of thought and extension:

> So we should note that all the effects which we see depend necessarily on extension must be attributed to this attribute, e.g., Motion and Rest... For if one thing produces another, there must be some being in it through which it can produce that rather than something else... E.g., if a stone is lying at rest, it is impossible that it should be able to be moved by the power of thinking, or anything else but motion, as when another stone, having more motion than this has rest, makes it move... So it follows, then, that no mode of thinking will be able to produce either motion or rest in the body.[57]

The generality of these reflections had already been announced: 'What we say here about extension, we say also about thought, and everything there is.'[58] This reappearance of Descartes' bane, and Spinoza's growing concern about it, signals perhaps a mid-point in the evolution of the conception of mind and body in the *Short Treatise*, reflected in these troubled remarks on the impossibility of interaction between incommensurable attributes.

[57] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 131.

[58] Ibid.

It is perhaps in response to anxieties such as these that Spinoza at times resorts to the Cartesian gambit of interposing the 'animal spirits' between the soul and body:

> [T]he soul's power to move the spirits can also be hindered, either because the motion of the spirits is much decreased, or because it is much increased. It is decreased, for example, when we have run a great deal... It is increased, for example, when we drink too much wine or other strong drink, thereby becoming merry, or drunk, and destroying the soul's power to govern the body.[59]
>
> Now what is it that medicines or wine bring about? This: that by their action they drive these spirits from the heart and make room again. When the soul becomes aware of this, it gets relief... This cannot be an immediate action of the wine on the soul, but only an action of the wine on the spirits [and thereby on the soul].[60]

However, despite interposing the animal spirits in this way, Spinoza, unlike Descartes, seems to have appreciated that this leaves the crucial problem unresolved:

> [A] possible objection is this: we see that the soul, though it has nothing in common with the body, nevertheless can bring it about that the spirits, which would have moved in one direction, now however move in another direction - why, then, could they not also make a body which is completely at rest begin to move? Similarly, why could it not also move wherever it will all other bodies that already have motion?[61]

In response to this 'possible objection', Spinoza finally begins to anticipate the mature conception of mind and body developed later in the *Ethics*. Thus, in perhaps the 'youngest' stratum of the *Short Treatise*, the relationship between mind and body is framed more in terms of a 'union' that consists in a shared substantial ground expressed through different attributes:

> But if we recall what we have already said about the thinking thing, we will be able to remove this difficulty very easily. We said then that *although Nature has different attributes, it is nevertheless only one unique Being, of which all these attributes are predicated.*[62]

[59] Ibid. p. 132.

[60] Ibid. p. 135, note 'b'.

[61] Ibid. pp. 135-6.

[62] Ibid. p. 137, emphasis in original.

But why should this offer a way around the problem? Spinoza explains in a lengthy note:

> There is no difficulty here as to how this one mode, which differs infinitely from the other, acts on the other... Between the Idea [i.e. the soul] and the object [i.e. the body] there must necessarily be a union... For there is no thing of which there is not an Idea in the thinking thing, and no idea can exist unless the thing also exists... [So] the object cannot be changed unless the Idea is also changed, and *vice versa*, so that no third thing is necessary here which would produce the union of soul and body.[63]

But even here, the question is put in terms of how 'one mode, which differs infinitely from the other, *acts on* the other', that is, it still assumes a fundamentally *interactionist* relationship between mind and body.

Having sketched out a conjectural 'excavation', there appear to be three principal phases to the evolution of Spinoza's conception of mind and body in the *Short Treatise*: the oldest stratum is characterised by an untroubled acceptance of mind-body interaction, but is not yet framed in terms of a shared substantial ground; the mid-stratum consists in a kind of crisis-phase in which recourse is made to the Cartesian strategy of interposing the 'animal spirits' between mind and body; and in the youngest stratum, in which Spinoza comes closest to the parallelism of the *Ethics*, the interaction between mind and body is grounded on the co-attribution of a single shared substance. However, even this most developed conception in the *Short Treatise* falls short of the position eventually reached in the *Ethics*, for the appeal to 'one unique Being, of which all these attributes are predicated', is still made in an attempt to support an interactionist account. The last crucial step with which this growing conception is finally completed does not come until the *Ethics*, in which the very notion of interaction is subverted in light of the true nature of mind and body, understood as distinct expressions of one and the same reality. Edging ever nearer in the *Short Treatise* towards appreciating these implications of the incommensurability of thought and extension, Spinoza would only finally consummate the train of thought in the *Ethics*:

[63] Ibid. p. 136, note 'c'.

> [Because] each attribute is conceived through itself without any other (by IP10)... the modes of each attribute involve the concept of their own attribute, [and] not of another one; and so (by IA4) they have God for their cause insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other.[64]

This, of course, is the final stepping-stone before the celebrated statement of 'parallelism':

> [W]hatever can be perceived by an infinite intellect... pertains to one substance only, and consequently the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that. So also a mode of extension [i.e. a body] and the idea of that mode [i.e. its mind or soul] are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways. Some of the Hebrews seem to have seen this, as if through a cloud, when they maintained that God, God's intellect, and the things understood by him are one and the same.[65]

The 'parallelism' of attributes in general, and of mind and body in particular

The inescapable conclusion of the *Ethics* is that ideas can be affected by the ideal alone, while bodies can be affected by the corporeal alone. The 'problem' of mind-body interaction simply dissolves, because there is no interaction to account for. This might seem to leave a gap in need of filling in, if only by way of explaining why it should *seem* as though there is mutual influence between mind and body, and it is here that Spinoza's famous doctrine of parallelism comes into play. According to the doctrine, there is always a mental aspect to bodily goings-on, and indeed always a bodily aspect to mental goings-on. Misdescribing what happens at the metaphysical level, one confuses the two aspects by describing either direction of influence in terms of mind-body interaction. But that is not to say that there is no metaphysically legitimate description at all, since there is still intra-, if not inter-attribute, causation.

When presenting the doctrine in the *Ethics*, Spinoza begins, as he does in the *Short Treatise*, by explaining the particular in light of the general. That is, it is because of the nature of thought and extension in general that particular ideas and bodies should correlate with each other locally. It remains the case in the *Ethics* that it is of the nature of thought to express 'objectively' whatever exists in nature, and so every causal interaction between individual bodies will be mirrored by a relationship of

[64] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p6dem.

[65] Ibid. 2p7s.

entailment between the objective essence of the cause and the objective essence of the effect. Spinoza points out that this should already be 'clear from 1a4', which states that '[t]he knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause'.[66] It helps to remember that, for Spinoza, the 'objective essence' of a thing, or its 'idea', exists in the 'infinite intellect' of God, and therefore counts as true knowledge, even if attainment of this knowledge by this or that particular person is only ever partial or 'inadequate'. These 'mirror images' - the determination of a physical effect by its cause, on the one hand, and the entailment of a consequent from its reason, on the other - are one and the same relationship, just viewed in two different ways. 'The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.'[67]

Although it may seem as though Spinoza has retained a priority of sorts in favour of the attribute of extension, since he continues to hold that it is of the nature of ideas to be *of* things in nature, suggesting that what comes *first* (at least logically) are these things in nature, this is not the case. The more or less dualistic conception of mind and body found in the *Short Treatise* does seem to involve a priority of this kind in favour of the body over the mind. 'The essence of the soul', is said to consist in 'the being of an Idea, or objective essence, in the thinking attribute, *arising from* the essence of an object which in fact exists in Nature.'[68] This priority is implied in various places in the text, even though it is in violation of the core metaphysical principle on which the *Short Treatise* is based, according to which, 'Nature is a being of which all attributes are predicated'.[69] But, then again, so are all the versions of the dualistic conception from which the text never quite frees itself. Both throwbacks are only finally purged in the *Ethics*, with the demonstration of the 'parallelism' of the attributes. Although it continues to be of the nature of thought in general, and of ideas in particular, to be *about* things in nature, the trick of the later work consists in dissolving any priority or imbalance among the attributes, so that what remains is only symmetry. Peter's essence is expressed jointly by both his *essentia formalis* and his *essentia obiective*; neither precedes the other. Peter is, at one and the same time, both *who he is* and *who he is known* (or knowable) to be.

---

[66] Ibid. 1a4.

[67] Ibid. 2p7.

[68] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, Appendix II, p. 154, emphasis added.

[69] Ibid. I, p. 72.

What might appear to be an asymmetry among the attributes can only seem that way when the 'direction of expression', that is, the principle that all attributes jointly and in tandem express the nature of substance, is ignored. Comparing the attributes one with another, it might seem as though thought depends on extension, or perhaps that the attribute of thought is 'overinflated' (since there is an idea for each thing under each attribute, including thought itself, so that there is an idea for every idea, and another idea for that idea, and so on *ad infinitum*).[70] But this kind of comparison begins from the modal level, taking this to be most fundamental, and attempts to measure the attributes against each other, which, Spinoza warned, is to violate their intrinsic *incommensurability*. When a perspective is instead adopted from the natural priority of substance, or nature as a whole, the various different attributes can only be understood as being on the same ontological footing, each in their own distinctive way expressing the nature of substance. This perspective was already available, albeit in nascent form, at the time of the *Short Treatise*. As sketched above, Spinoza came steadily closer to drawing out the implications of this perspective for the relationship among the attributes, for he already held that 'God, the first cause of all things', is 'a being of which all, or infinite, attributes are predicated, each of which is infinitely perfect in its own kind'.[71]

But the implications of the order of nature for the symmetry of the attributes would only be fully recognised in the *Ethics*. Determined in the mature work to follow the order of nature as faithfully as possible, he begins by demonstrating the necessary existence of 'a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence', before turning to the modifications of substance, which 'can neither be nor be conceived without substance'.[72] From this perspective, each attribute is equally credited with expressing the nature of substance in its own way, and they are all on this fundamental level, so to speak, 'on a par', equally infinite but mutually autonomous. It is ultimately as a result of this view of the order of nature that the *Ethics* must be read as having overturned any residual priority or imbalance among the attributes, and also in which the fundamental unity in 'the order and connection of ideas' and 'the order and connection of things' lies.[73]

---

[70] What Bennett calls the 'lopsidedness' of the attribute of thought, together with the problem that it poses for my reading, will be addressed in Chapter 7. Bennett, *Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 62.

[71] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, I, p. 65.

[72] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p11, 1p15dem.

[73] Of course, it is true that the structure of the *Short Treatise* was also very much intended to follow this same order of nature, the first part concerned with the most general nature of God and the

Just as there is no dependence of the ideal on the extended, nor is there any dependence of the extended on the ideal:

> [T]he formal being of things which are not modes of thinking does not follow from the divine nature because [God] has first known the things; rather the objects of ideas follow and are inferred from their attributes in the same way and by the same necessity as that with which we have shown ideas to follow from the attribute of Thought.[74]

Although I have focussed on the relationship between thought and extension, it is important to remember that this is only one application of a general thesis (hence the conjunctive adverb at (2p7s), 'and consequently'). That is, there is within the infinite intellect of God an objective essence for each and every formal essence, whether the formal essence belongs to something extended, something mental, or indeed to something under any of the infinity of God's attributes. In the case of an objective essence expressing the formal essence of a mode of thought, for example, the result is the idea of an idea, or *idea ideæ*.[75] But for precisely the same reasons that 'a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways', an idea and the idea of that idea are likewise 'one and the same thing', only in this case 'conceived under one and the same attribute, viz. Thought'.[76] As for the distinction between an idea and the idea of that idea, Spinoza explains, 'the idea of the idea is nothing but the form of the idea insofar as this is considered as a mode of thinking without relation to the object'.[77] Of course, by 'object', Spinoza means the object of which the first-order idea is an idea, not that idea itself, which *is* indeed the object of the second-order idea. This relationship between ideas and ideas of ideas is, as discussed above, another angle from which to understand Spinoza's 'direct' model of thought, according to which truth is self-illuminating and knowledge self-certifying: 'For as soon as someone knows something, he thereby knows that he knows it, and at the same time knows that he knows that he knows, and so on, to infinity'.[78]

---

second with the particular fortunes of humanity, but it seems that the full extent of the implications that this order has for the relationship among the attributes, taken generally, and between an individual mind and body, in particular, would only dawn on Spinoza when he came to write the *Ethics*.

[74] Ibid. 2p6c.

[75] Ibid. 2p20, 2p21.

[76] Ibid. 2p7s, 2p21s.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

So committed was Spinoza to the generality of this 'parallelism', that he was willing to embrace what some critics have taken to be one of the more outlandish tenets of his system, that is, the 'mindedness' of each and every thing in nature, right down to the most seemingly lifeless sticks and stones: 'For the things we have shown so far are completely general and do not pertain more to man than to other Individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate.'[79] To some this has seemed a step too far, for while it might be reasonable to assign a distinct 'form' - or intelligibility - to each thing, including mundane sticks and stones, it seems like an altogether more extravagant requirement that we credit such things with a mental life. But in fact this result is not as bizarre as it may at first seem, and Spinoza himself is careful to add the qualification, 'though in different degrees'.[80] Although ideas are all self-illuminating (in virtue of their respective *ideæ idearum*), and so all involve *some degree* of 'knowledge', publicly available to all but peculiarly available to that which happens to be 'encased' in the first-order idea's *ideatum*, the nature of the ideas will vary to precisely the same extent as the nature of the things themselves, so that what, to us, is the most familiar and paradigmatic kind of mind, i.e. the human mind, will be as different in nature to the mind of a stone as a human being is to the stone itself. Yet, despite this vast distance between our own mental life and that of sticks and stones, anyone who has seen a time-lapsed recording of the growth of crystals, looked through a powerful microscope at the crawling micro-particles on the surface of what otherwise seem to be motionless sticks or stones (as Spinoza, the lens grinder and acquaintance of Johannes Hudde, presumably spent some time doing), or taken a long view of the geology of the earth, can surely sympathise with the generality of the claim that all things are, in their own way, 'animate'.[81]

Self-consciousness, which is so readily associated with mindedness, need only be attributed to beings endowed with a sufficient degree of complexity, both anatomically and socially:

---

[79] Ibid. 2p14s.

[80] Ibid.

[81] See, for example, the letter Spinoza wrote to Hudde asking for advice on polishing lenses. Letter 41; Spinoza, *The Letters*, pp. 209-10.

> And so to determine what is the difference between the human Mind and the others, and how it surpasses them, it is necessary for us, as we have said, to know the nature of its object, i.e., of the human Body.[82]

If we do so, we will find that it is 'more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once', or, in other words, that it is embedded in a network of interactions that is of far greater complexity than that in which other things are embedded.[83] Therefore 'its Mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once', including, even, its own mindedness, as in the reflective awareness characteristic of self-consciousness.[84] The 'physical digression' which follows (2p13s) is essentially concerned with elaborating this scale of complexity within nature as a whole, portraying nature as a vast unchanging system made up of sub-systems, changing relative to the parent system but unchanging in themselves, which in turn are made up of further sub-systems, and so on, until one considers the particular system of humanity, made up of individual human bodies related to each other in complex ways, themselves consisting of organs, the organs of tissue, the tissue of cells, and so on. Spinoza actually proceeds in the opposite direction, from the less to the more complex, and does not yet of course have recourse to this kind of biological language. Nevertheless, one cannot help reading this passage as the expression of an inherently organic view of nature, in light of which one enjoys a far more intuitive grasp of the initially startling claim that everything in nature is 'animate', or 'minded':

> So far we have conceived an Individual which is composed only of bodies which are distinguished from one another only by motion and rest, speed and slowness, i.e., which is composed of the simplest bodies. But if we should now conceive of another, composed of a number of Individuals of a different nature, we shall find that it can be affected in a great many other ways, and still preserve its nature... But if we should further conceive a third kind of Individual, composed [NS: of many individuals] of this second kind, we shall find that it can be affected in many other ways, without any change of its form. And if we proceed in this way to infinity, we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one Individual, whose parts, i.e., all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole Individual.[85]

It is no wonder that the later rise of organicism among the German Romantics should accompany a resurgence of enthusiasm for Spinoza's philosophy.

---

[82] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p13s.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid. 2l7s.

In summary, by applying what is a completely general thesis about the attributes of substance to the particular nature of a human being, 'we understand not only that the human Mind is united to the Body, but also what should be understood by the union of Mind and Body'.[86] As discussed above, the union between mind and body is to be understood as a kind of 'identity'. It is only a *kind* of identity, because although the mind and body are one and the same thing in the sense that they are distinct expressions of the *same* reality, nevertheless (and simply shifting the emphasis) it remains true that they are *distinct* expressions of the same reality, that is, they are modes of substance under attributes that are in themselves complete and forever mutually incommensurable expressions of nature. As in the example from the previous chapter, when looking at a human being, one can at times think about (or see) that person in purely physical, or physiological, terms, and at other times think about (or see) him or her as a mindful being. The point is that, understanding a person in one or another of these two ways confines one conceptually within a certain field of meaning, neither of which is conceptually subordinate to the other. It does not, therefore, make sense to reduce mindful behaviour to physical causes, nor *vice versa*. In contrast to the implied imbalance in the *Short Treatise* such that there is a certain priority of extension over thought, the *Ethics* contains a powerful argument for the mutual irreducibility and ontological parity of the attributes, with perhaps much to contribute to contemporary discussions on the subject.

What this means for Spinoza's eschatology

What can be concluded on the basis of the trajectory charted from the *Short Treatise* to the *Ethics*? It was noted that, even in the most logically developed conception of the earlier text, Spinoza still ultimately retains an essentially 'interactionist' model of the mind-body relationship. Although he had already conceived of thought and extension as attributes of the same unique reality, and had at times begun to construct a conception of mind-body union on that basis, he still clearly regarded the nature of thought and extension to be sufficiently *disconnected* for there to be a question of how the one might interact with the other. That is, he still ultimately

[86] Ibid. 2p13s.

understood the mind (a mode of thought) and the body (a mode of extension) as enjoying an ontological independence amounting even, perhaps, to a *separability* of the two (if not in fact, then at least in principle, as in Descartes' conception).[87] If this is true of the most developed conception one finds in the *Short Treatise*, in which Spinoza came closest to the parallelism of the *Ethics*, then it is of course all the more true of the earlier incarnations in that work.

It is perhaps understandable, then, why at the time of writing the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza at times appeared to entertain a more temporally framed doctrine of human immortality, in which the soul can exist apart, subsequent to the death of the body. Just as Descartes, who apparently brought his entire metaphysical conception of mind and body into the service of this traditional Judaeo-Christian doctrine, had premised the possibility of the soul surviving the death of the body on the ultimate separability of the two, so too would Spinoza, at the time of writing the *Short Treatise*, be entitled to that same application.[88] If, in addition, one recalls the adventures of Spinoza's conception of eternity traced in Chapter 2, a conception which itself underwent a gradual transformation over the same period of time as his conception of mind, then it begins to make sense why at certain points in the *Short Treatise* he veers towards an eschatology involving the continued existence, in time and following the death of the body, of a separate entity called the 'soul'. If one keeps an eye on this earlier phase of both conceptions in the *Short Treatise*, then one may read Spinoza's claim to have proven 'the eternal and constant duration of the intellect' as an earnest assessment of what he had shown, i.e., the unending, temporal, existence of the soul, both when the body exists and when it does not.[89]

But perhaps the principal insight to be gleaned from having charted the successive stages in the evolution of Spinoza's conception of mind is that the *Short Treatise* contains a patchwork of distinct yet related notions. In particular, it makes sense of the apparent indecision or vacillation in the eschatological remarks found in the

---

[87] 'Hence the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct, since they are capable of being separated, at least by God.' Descartes, *Meditations*, p. 54, AT VII.78.

[88] '[S]ome have even had the audacity to assert that… the soul dies along with the body and that the opposite view is based on faith alone. But in its eighth session the Lateran Council held under Leo X… expressly enjoined Christian philosophers to refute their arguments… so I have not hesitated to attempt this task… I know that the only reason why many irreligious people are unwilling to believe that God exists and that the human mind is distinct from the body is the alleged fact that no one has hitherto been able to demonstrate these points.' Ibid. 'Dedicatory Letter to the Sorbonne', p. 3, AT VII.3.

[89] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 149.

work. It would not be surprising were it to turn out that the variation in eschatological views expressed in the *Short Treatise* followed a similar pattern, both logically and chronologically, as that of the various conceptions of mind. It seems plausible to suggest that, as his conception of mind progressed away from its more or less Cartesian origins (involving causal interaction between mind and body), and towards its eventual culmination in the parallelism of the *Ethics*, so too, at the same time, did the eschatology of the *Short Treatise* move gradually further away from a Cartesian model, and closer to the 'philosophical eschatology' of the *Ethics*, eventually to be framed in terms of the 'eternity of the mind'.

This would explain why there are already glimpses of a 'realised,' or 'this-life', eschatology in the *Short Treatise* itself. Spinoza replaces, for example, the traditional eschatology of eternal punishment with a naturalised re-interpretation, arguing that 'sadness, despair, envy, fright, and other evil passions' are the 'real hell itself'.[90] Conversely, and in the same passage, he gives a 'this-life' re-interpretation of the eschatology of 'eternal salvation':

> [T]his knowledge [of the human condition, as set out in the second part of the work] also brings us to the point where we attribute everything to God, love him alone, because he is most magnificent and supremely perfect, and offer ourselves entirely to him. *For that is what true religion and our eternal salvation and happiness really consist in.*[91]

In other words, just as the concluding proposition of the *Ethics* finds that 'blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself', the implicit eschatology of these more advanced strata of the *Short Treatise* casts 'eternal salvation', less as an afterlife awaiting us in reward for having loved nature and its inhabitants, and more as a kind of immortality, or, as will emerge over the following chapters, a 'freedom from death', that consists in the very quality of such a life itself.[92] For, in light of the parallelism of the *Ethics*, the soul cannot outlast the body in any familiar, temporal, sense. As will be explored in the following chapters, there is instead in the later work a consummation of the inchoate 'this-life' eschatology beginning to appear in the *Short Treatise*, according to which one's relationship with one's own mortality is understood in terms of an existential orientation of the life one lives as one lives it. As will emerge in what follows, however, there is far more involved in this

[90] Ibid. p. 128.

[91] Ibid. pp. 128-9, emphasis added.

[92] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p42.

naturalised, 'philosophical', reinterpretation of the eschatological than has so far been touched on, inasmuch as it draws on the full extent of Spinoza's philosophical resources to give substance to his own distinctive response to the question of human mortality, which continued to be of great importance to him in his later writings.

Enough for me the mystery of the eternity of life,
and the inkling of the marvellous structure of reality,
together with the single-hearted endeavour to
comprehend a portion, be it never so tiny,
of the reason that manifests itself in nature.

Albert Einstein, *The World as I See it*

Chapter 5

Cognition

Spinoza's account of human cognition plays a key role in the eschatology of the *Ethics*. Not only does the 'third kind of cognition [*tertium cognitionis genus*]' depend 'on the mind, as on a formal cause, insofar as the mind itself is eternal', but also 'death is less harmful to us, the greater the mind's clear and distinct cognition [*clara et distincta cognitio major est*]'.[1] There is thus a reciprocal relationship - in both directions - between this higher form of cognition and the eternality of the mind. This chapter will therefore be concerned with Spinoza's account of cognition. After setting out the physiological basis for cognition as he conceived it (building on the conception of mind already examined in Chapter 4), I will turn to Spinoza's famous hierarchy of the various kinds of cognition. I will consider the way in which these different modes of cognition relate to the species of duration and eternity (discussed in Chapter 3), concentrating on the peculiar nature of the kind of cognition he calls 'intuitive knowledge [*scientia intuitiva*]', and its close connection with the eternal nature of God or Nature through a state of 'intellectual love [*amor intellectualis*]'. Delving into the significance of Spinoza's correlation of adequate ideas with the species of eternity, on the one hand, and inadequate ideas with duration, on the other, I will suggest that the crucial difference between these kinds of ideas consists in the extent to which a person autonomously forms them, since adequate ideas, on Spinoza's view, are the fruits of mental *action*, whereas inadequate ideas result from the mind being *acted on*. This will suggest that Spinoza's 'rationalism' might be best understood, not in terms of an opposition between the sensual and the intellectual, but rather in

[1] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p31, 5p38s.

terms of a distinction between autonomy and heteronomy. As a result of reconsidering Spinoza's rationalism in this way, it will become possible to appreciate the more inclusive and holistic nature of his account of cognition, the highest expression of which involves a kind of harmony among the deliverances of *imaginatio* and *opinio*, the organising role of *ratio*, and the immediate flash of insight glimpsed through *scientia intuitiva*.

From the physiology of perception to the varieties of cognition

With the essential nature of the mind *qua* 'idea of the body' established in the first thirteen propositions of *Ethics* II, the next port of call for this part of the work is to explain the mechanism of cognition. This transition is facilitated by an interlude consisting of 'a few things concerning the nature of bodies', now generally known as the 'physical digression', in which the outlines of a more or less Cartesian, mechanistic, physics are laid out.[2] It is on the basis of this mechanistic physics that the nature of human perception is established.

> All modes by which a body is affected by another body follow both from the nature of the body affected and at the same time from the nature of the affecting body.[3]

From this axiom, together with the parallelism established at (2p7) and indeed already anticipated at (1a4), Spinoza can deduce the fundamental nature of perception:

> For all the modes in which a body is affected follow from the nature of the affected body, and at the same time from the nature of the affecting body (by a1"). So the idea of them (by 1a4) will necessarily involve the nature of each body.[4]

However, although these ideas necessarily involve (*involvere*) the nature of external objects in this way, they reflect more the perspective of the perceiver than the true nature of those objects. This is because '[t]he knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause', but at this stage of human cognition, the

[2] Ibid. 2p13s and *passim*.

[3] Ibid. 2p13a".

[4] Ibid. 2p16.

order is reversed, such that the nature of the external thing is known *only* through the nature of its effect, i.e., the affection of the perceiver's body.[5] This is illustrated nicely by one of Spinoza's favourite examples:

> [W]hen we look at the sun, we imagine it as about 200 feet away from us... because an affection of our body involves the essence of the sun insofar as our body is affected by the sun.[6]

The 'affections of the human Body whose ideas [re-]present [*repræsentant*] external bodies as present to us', Spinoza calls the 'images of things [*rerum imagines*]', which are 'imagined [*imaginari*]' by the mind.[7] Curley translates '*repræsentant*' here as 'present' rather than as 'represent', a translation that would seem to support my ascription of a 'direct' account of cognition to Spinoza.[8] But it is not necessary to opt for this translation in order to maintain my interpretation, since the point here is, in any case, to introduce a form of cognition *not yet* vindicated as adequate, but framed instead in terms of the relativity of perspective and the 'random [*vaga*]' effects of external objects on the perceiver, or, in other words, more a form of representation than presentation.

However, it is important to recognise that this foundational level of cognition, which Spinoza terms 'imagination [*imaginatio*]', is not in itself erroneous. We are not mistaken in seeing the sun *as though* it were a small disc in the sky, perhaps a few hundred feet away, because of our particular vantage point. It is only if we fail to grasp the general relationship between perspective and spatial positioning that we may be misled into taking this appearance of the sun to constitute its nature, that is, if we judge that the sun is in fact a small disc a few hundred feet away in the sky. On the contrary, our perception provides at least a partial *presentation* of the sun's true nature, even if this idea stands in need of further refinement. The partiality of this presentation can also be characterised as a kind of 'representation', which stands to become less of a representation and more of a presentation in the light of further cognitive assimilation. So this foundational level of cognition plays an important role in our overall cognition of things. Indeed, in ideal circumstances the faculty of imagination should be considered a powerful virtue:

---

[5] Ibid. 1a4. See Gueroult, *Spinoza*, vol. II, pp. 196-7.

[6] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p35s. Clearly fond of this particular example, Spinoza mentions it in several places in his writings. Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §§21, 78; Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4def6, 4p1s. Wolfson traces the example back to Aristotle's *De Anima*, 428b2-4.

[7] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p17s.

[8] See Chapter 4, pp. 87-9.

> For if the Mind, while it imagined non-existent things as present to it, at the same time knew that those things did not exist, it would, of course, attribute this power of imagining to a virtue of its nature, not to a vice - especially if this faculty of imagining depended only on its own nature, i.e. (by ID7), if the Mind's faculty of imagining were free.[9]

As will emerge in what follows, it is not in virtue of the relativity of sensory perception that this form of cognition is ranked 'below' those of *ratio* and *scientia intuitiva*, but rather, because, in the *absence* of such 'higher' forms of cognition, it must remain essentially unfree.

Spinoza's division of the cognitive faculties, which recurs with only minor variations at each stage of his intellectual development, was his contribution to an established tradition of ranking lower and higher forms of cognition according to a scale of 'clearness' or 'truth'. Plato, in the *Republic*, had set a precedent:

> [L]et there be four faculties in the soul - reason answering to the highest, understanding to the second, faith (or conviction) to the third, and perception of shadows to the last, [such] that the several faculties have clearness in the same degree that their objects have truth.[10]

There are distinct echoes of Plato's classification in each of Spinoza's formulations, one of which, in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, distinguishes four faculties, and two of which, including the mature version of the *Ethics*, distinguish three. But if this tradition of ranking the cognitive faculties can be traced at least as far back as Plato, it is in fact the Aristotelian approach to explicating the distinct functions of the faculties to which Spinoza is most indebted.[11] For Spinoza inherited the broadly Aristotelian framework whereby the psychological mechanism of cognition is to be explained in terms of a metaphysical relationship between knower and known. It might be ventured, further, that Spinoza adopted a version of this framework in a way that is especially reminiscent of Aquinas, for whom the highest form of knowledge, or '*scientia*' - higher than discursive reasoning, '*ratio*' or

---

[9] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p17s.

[10] Plato, *Republic,* in *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. II, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 511d.

[11] In fact, it predates Plato, with an early expression, for example, in the fragments attributed to Parmenides, whose early fifth century BC poem, known as *On Nature*, warns 'you' (the reader) to 'let not habit do violence to you on the empirical way of exercising an unseeing eye and a noisy ear and tongue, but decide by reason (*logos*) the controversial test enjoined by me'. Parmenides, *The Fragments of Parmenides: A Critical Text with Introduction and Translation, the Ancient Testimonia and a Commentary*, ed. Allan H. Coxon and Richard McKirahan, trans. Richard McKirahan (Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2009), p. 62.

'*ratiocinatio*' - was intuition (*intuitus*), in which the knower is united with what is known, namely God, in an immediate and incorrigible episode of intellection.[12]

In each of Spinoza's formulations of the hierarchy, the lowest kind of cognition is linked to 'report or... some conventional sign [*ex auditu aut ex aliquo signo*]', and to 'random experience [*experientia vaga*]'.[13] It seems he regarded the latter as in a way superior to the former, ranking it higher in the hierarchy as he presents it in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, and in the *Short Treatise* describing its possessor as being of 'quicker perception' than one who rests content with mere report.[14] But he would ultimately group the two together (both in the *Short Treatise* and in the *Ethics*) under the heading of 'cognition of the first kind, opinion [*opinio*] or imagination [*imaginatio*]'.[15] Again, he was consistent in all his writings in ranking a kind of cognition above this, which includes the adequate ideas called 'common notions' and those adequate ideas that can be inferred from them, or from other adequate ideas, a kind of '[p]erception that we have when the essence of a thing is inferred from another thing'.[16] He calls this level in the hierarchy 'reason [*ratio*]', which is ranked above 'opinion or imagination' as 'the second kind of cognition'. But the pinnacle of his hierarchy is reserved for a kind of cognition that is 'intuitive [*intuitiva*]', 'immediate', and 'the clearest of all'. He describes this kind of cognition in notably experiential terms, akin to the familiar experience of simply 'seeing' that something is a certain way, or that two things are related in a certain way. For example, when it comes to grasping the proportionality 'in the simplest numbers', say in '1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth proportional number is 6', a relation that, 'in one glance, we see the first number to have to the second'.[17] This flash of intellectual perception, in which the essential properties or relations of things are simply 'seen' in a basic and primitive way, he calls 'intuitive knowledge [*scientia intuitiva*]'.

---

[12] It cannot be asserted with any certainty that Spinoza derived this kind of conception from Aquinas, but this is true of tracing his sources generally, since he rarely cites these in his writings. In any case, the similarity between the two thinkers on the nature of cognition is worth noting.

[13] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §19. KV, II, p. 97. In the *Short Treatise*, the lowest kind of cognition, 'belief', is said to arise 'either from experience or from report [*of door onderfinding, of door hooren zeggen*]'. Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 97. In the *Ethics*, we are said to 'perceive many things… from signs [*ex signis*]'. Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p40s2.

[14] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §19; Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 98.

[15] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p40s2.

[16] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §19.

[17] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p40s2.

The cognitive hierarchy in relation to duration and eternity

Along with these contrasting specifications of the varieties of cognition, Spinoza would also coordinate his scale with reference to the distinct species of duration and eternity. In the course of elaborating on the nature of the intellect in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, he includes the following characterisation:

> It perceives things not so much under duration as under a certain species of eternity [*sub quadam specie æternitatis*], and in an infinite number - or rather, to perceive things, it attends neither to number nor to duration; but when it imagines things, it perceives them under a certain number, determinate duration and quantity [*sub certo... durationе*]'.[18]

There are at least four points worth noting here. Firstly, Spinoza appears to be distinguishing between two functions of the intellect, i.e., 'perception' and 'imagination'. This is interesting because, instead of contrasting the intellect with the imagination, as one might expect, he in fact makes the latter a species of the former, as Descartes had done before him.[19] Secondly, by 'perception' in the narrow sense, that is, as contrasted with 'imagination', he implies something epistemically 'factive', in the way that 'seeing' is taken to imply a veridical visual experience, as opposed to merely 'seeming to see'. Therefore perception in this narrow sense is not epistemically neutral, like the broader sense of the term. It is the broader, neutral, sense of the term in Spinoza's claim that 'when it [i.e., the intellect] imagines things, it *perceives* them', since the imagination is potentially, but *only* potentially, a source of error. Thirdly, in glossing 'infinite number' as 'in fact', attending 'neither to number nor to duration', it seems clear that what Spinoza is rejecting is not the application of the notion of number to the infinite *tout court*, but rather any putatively 'quantitative' understanding of the infinite, an interpretation confirmed by comments that he makes in the 'letter on the infinite', which I will discuss below. Finally, while there is, on the one hand, a correlation between the species of eternity and veridical perception, there is equally, on the other hand, a correlation between the species of duration and the imagination, which is considered to be potentially fallible in lieu of

[18] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §108.

[19] Descartes subdivides the operations of the intellect into 'sensory perception, imagination and pure understanding,' all of which are taken to be 'perceptions' in a broader sense. Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I, §32, p. 204, AT VIII.17.

further guidance and integration by the higher faculties into a fuller grasp of the thing in question.

So the imagination perceives things 'under a certain... determinate duration [*sub certo... duratione*]', whereas the intellect (narrowly construed) perceives things 'under a certain species of eternity [*sub quadam specie æternitatis*]'. This correlation in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* between a cognitive hierarchy and the species of duration and eternity is maintained and developed in subsequent works. In the *Short Treatise* we find, while not quite the same talk of perceiving things 'under' (a species of) duration or eternity, nevertheless at least implicitly the same correlation. Love, which is said to arise 'from the perception and knowledge which we have of a thing', can be for objects 'corruptible in themselves', or for objects which, 'through their cause, are not corruptible', or for a third kind of object which, 'solely through its own power and capacity, is eternal and incorruptible'.[20] If love depends on 'the perception and knowledge which we have of a thing', then to be able to love this third kind of object one must first have perception and knowledge of it which, in order to be true, must be framed under a 'certain species of eternity', since the thing is itself eternal. Similarly, the category of 'corruptible' things is said to include 'all the singular things, which have not existed from all time, but have had a beginning', and so would, by parity of reasoning, be framed under a 'certain species of duration'.[21] As for the second kind of object, it is said to include 'all those modes which we have said are the cause of the singular modes' – a category that Spinoza would develop in the *Ethics* under the rubric of the 'infinite modes'.[22] Again, the correlation, indeed union, between the eternal nature of God and the eternal 'effects of the intellect' is suggested once more in the *Short Treatise*, when it is said that 'the effects of the intellect which are united with [God or Nature] are the most excellent... [and] moreover, they also must be eternal, for their cause is eternal'.[23]

The correlation between the cognitive hierarchy and the species of duration and eternity is implicitly reiterated in the 'letter on the infinite' that Spinoza wrote to his friend, Lodewijk Meyer:

---

[20] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 105.

[21] Here we must remember that, at the time of writing the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza had yet to decisively separate the meaning of eternity from that of simply endless time. See Chapter 2.

[22] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p21 and *passim*.

[23] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 148.

> [W]e conceive quantity in two ways: either abstractly, or [*sive*] superficially, as we have it in the imagination with the help of the senses; or as Substance, apprehended solely by means of the intellect. So if we have regard to quantity as it exists in the imagination (and this is what we most frequently and readily do), it will be found to be divisible, finite, composed of parts, and manifold. But if we have regard to it as it is in the intellect and we apprehend the thing, as it is in itself (and this is very difficult), then it is found to be infinite, indivisible and one alone.[24]

In light of the distinction between duration and eternity discussed in Chapter 2, it seems clear that what is being distinguished in this letter is quantity *qua* quantity and quantity *qua* quality. Quantity *qua* quantity would be number conceived as an aggregate, and, in the case of duration, in terms of a series of discrete moments in time conjoined together in a continuous extension of existence. But the confusion in such an 'abstract' conception can be appreciated from its generation of Zeno's famous paradox:

> When someone has conceived Duration abstractly, and by confusing it with Time begun to divide it into parts, he will never be able to understand, for example, how an hour can pass. For if an hour is to pass, it will be necessary for half of it to pass first, and then half of the remainder… So if you subtract half from the remainder in this way, to infinity, you will never reach the end of the hour.[25]

Quantity qua quality, on the other hand, is the only possible way to understand the infinite, which is indivisible and unique, and which has reference 'neither to number [*qua* quantity] nor to duration'. A qualitative grasp of the infinite is, like a qualitative grasp of eternity, a task for the intellect (in the narrow sense). It seems that Spinoza regarded the two notions, 'infinity' and 'eternity', not as synonymous in meaning, but in a sense two sides of the same coin.

Although the imagination is not erroneous in itself, when it is left to wander (which is the sense of the Latin '*vaga*'), unguided by the higher forms of cognition, it has the potential to lead one astray epistemically. It is in this qualified sense that Spinoza infers that, to this rank of the hierarchy 'pertain all those ideas which are inadequate and confused', and that it is 'the only cause of falsity'.[26] By the same token, cognition of the second and third kinds must be 'necessarily true', since the first kind is the *only* cause of falsity.[27] Therefore, these higher forms of cognition

---

[24] Letter 12; Spinoza, *The Letters*, p. 103.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p41.

[27] Ibid.

perceive things 'as they are in themselves, i.e. (by 1p29), not as contingent but as necessary'.[28] That there is no genuine contingency in the world, and that everything unfolds as a necessary consequence of the eternal nature of God or Nature, is a result proven as early as (1p29). It is only because of an unguarded impression produced by a wandering imagination that we regard things as contingent, as arising out of a chance confluence of time and place. This form of cognition is therefore limited to the species of duration. Spinoza illustrates why this should be the case with an example. If a child, he explains, sees Peter in the morning, Paul at noon, and Simon in the evening, then the involuntary effect on his imagination will be to associate each man with a certain time. As it stands he will 'imagine the sun taking the same course through the sky as he saw on the preceding day' and at the thought of Peter will relate Paul and Simon to a future time.[29] At the thought of Simon, however, he will relate Peter and Paul to a past time. But if on another day he sees James instead of Simon in the evening, then the following day his imagination will 'vacillate' and he will 'imagine now this one, now that one, with the future evening time'.[30] In other words, 'he will regard neither of them as certainly future, but both of them as contingently future'.[31] Nor is this natural tendency limited to thinking in terms of the past or future, but applies to reckonings about spatially or temporally distant occurrences generally. Equally illustrative of the errant tendency of our imaginative faculties are the associations formed with other ideas in our memory:

> For example, a soldier, having seen traces of a horse in the sand, will immediately pass from the thought of a horse to the thought of a horseman, and from that to the thought of war, etc. But a Farmer will pass from the thought of a horse to the thought of a plough, and then to that of a field, etc. And so each one, according as he has been accustomed to join and connect images of things in this or that way, will pass from one thought to another.[32]

On the other hand, since the 'necessity of things is the very necessity of God's eternal nature', the result that cognition of the second and third kinds perceives things 'as they are in themselves... [and thus] as necessary', amounts to the view that these forms of cognition 'perceive things under a certain species of eternity'.[33] It

[28] Ibid. 2p44dem.

[29] Ibid. 2p44s.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid. 2p18s.

[33] Ibid. 2p44c2dem, 2p44c2, 5p31dem.

follows that a conception of things *sub specie æternitatis* consists in conceiving things under the aspect of their necessary existence, that is, insofar as they are understood to be expressions of God's nature. Just what this 'aspect of necessary existence' means, I will come back to. For it will not be possible to reduce 'necessary existence' to 'extrinsic denominations, relations, or... circumstances', parameters that can only be taken to structure reality as it is conceived *sub specie durationis*, and 'which are far from the inmost essence of things'.[34] Therefore, necessary existence will have to be understood according to a very specific sense of determination - not a determination of an entity transitively determined by another, but a determination flowing from within 'the fixed and eternal things, and at the same time from the laws inscribed in these things, as in their true codes, according to which all singular things come to be, and are ordered' - a sense of determination that Spinoza will, in the *Ethics*, characterise as 'immanent'.

Inferiority of the first kind of cognition understood as a deficiency of freedom

Having set out a preliminary map of the connections between Spinoza's cognitive hierarchy and the two species of duration and eternity, I will now turn to look more closely at each individual rank in the hierarchy. In particular, why is it that cognition of the first kind, *opinio* or *imaginatio*, should be the source of 'all those ideas which are inadequate and confused' and 'the only cause of falsity', while cognition of either the second or third kinds is 'necessarily true'?[35] An explanation often given for this divergence between the different kinds of cognition is that Spinoza regarded the sensory quality of the first kind of cognition to unavoidably involve the illusion of mere surface appearances. Confined to an illusory dance of shadows, it is hopelessly incapable of penetrating into the immutable essence or inner nature of things, which is where the truth of things lies. This familiar 'rationalist' reading of Spinoza has an element of truth in it, but it is misleading in where it locates the crucial point of difference between the different kinds of cognition. It is also a reading that tends to undermine the collaboration and interaction that takes place among the different kinds of cognition, all of which together serve the shared aim of adequately

[34] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §101.

[35] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p41, 2p41dem.

perceiving the world. In order to separate out the element of truth from what is misleading in this reading, it will be helpful to present it in more detail.

The reading in question often emphasises Spinoza's apparent invective for the first kind of cognition, exemplified in his description of it as merely 'random experience [*experientia vaga*]', a troublesome source of perception that is 'mutilated, confused and without order [*mutilate, confuse et sine ordine*]'.[36] In this way he is presented as heir to Plato's valuation of the intellectual as more truthful or real than the sensory, as expressed by Socrates in the *Phædo*:

> He too has been captive. But philosophy has spoken to him, and he has heard her voice; she has gently entreated him, and brought him out of the 'miry clay', and purged away the mists of passion and the illusion of sense which envelop him; his soul has escaped from the influence of pleasure and pains, which are like nails fastening her to the body.[37]

Socrates explains to his interlocutors that 'all who apply themselves to the study of philosophy aright are… engaged in nothing else than in studying the art of dying and death', for in turning away from the illusion and captivity of the body, the soul is preparing itself for a purely intellectual existence after the death of the body, just as it existed before birth.[38] Not coincidentally, Spinoza's more immediate precedent, Descartes, combined a similar disparagement of the sensory and bodily with the hope of a future life for the soul after it departs from its corporeal prison. But this cannot have been Spinoza's position. In light of the parallelism explored in the previous chapter, each mode of thought, or idea, is correlated with a mode of extension, or bodily aspect, and in an important sense, these two modes are 'one and the same'. The Platonic, and Cartesian, notion of a 'purely intellectual' idea, separated from the body, is rejected on this account. Spinoza does not seem to be distinguishing between kinds of *ideas*, even though he is distinguishing between the kinds of *cognition* of ideas. The ideas, or objective essences, of things are what they are, and in grasping one of them in virtue of an idea formally existing within one's mind, one does so more or less successfully. A 'merely' sensory apprehension of an idea would remain precariously partial, but it would not be made redundant or invalidated by an increase in one's grasp of that idea through an active use of one's rational faculties. Thus, the notion that Spinoza split ideas into two fundamentally

---

[36] Ibid. 2p40s2.

[37] Plato, *Phædo*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. I, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 83.

[38] Ibid. 64.

distinct categories, the sensory and the intellectual, cannot be entirely correct.[39] Hobbes and Gassendi had each objected to Descartes categorising 'perceptions' in this way, complaining that philosophical reasoning cannot be substantially different in kind from what takes place in the imagination. Rather, it consists of those same ideas, only ordered in a certain ratiocinative way.[40]

Spinoza steers a middle course between Descartes and his critics. He does not recoil from the opposition between the sensory and the intellectual to a kind of 'empiricism', such that ideas are all sensory and rationality consists only in the way that they are ordered. This insight is indeed incorporated in his account, under the category of *ratio*, which concerns the ordering of ideas, but he also crucially includes a dimension in which one's grasp of an individual objective essence, or idea, can itself be enriched through a more penetrating perception of its nature. Contrary to the reading under consideration, it does not seem correct to attribute to Spinoza a dualism between sensory and intellectual ideas. It is not the ideas themselves that should be divided in this way, but rather the various ways in which someone grasps and organises the ideas. To return to the sun example, someone might begin with a (re-)presentation of the sun furnished by his or her perception of it, an idea that can at this stage be no more than a partial apprehension of its true nature. As noted above, this is in some sense a precarious stage in a person's awareness of the sun, since his or her imagination might inadvertently 'wander' on to any number of involuntary associations engendered by the experience, which could lead him or her to misjudge the case. On the other hand, a person may come to appreciate more about the nature of the sun through learning certain astronomical truths that are expressed in the sun's existence. In doing so, however, the original idea of the sun will not be replaced by a better, purely intellectual, idea, but will simply be grasped more fully by that person. Because the objective essence of the sun belongs to the sun itself, and is publicly available to everyone, the question is not whether an idea that is privately formed by someone is sensory or intellectual, but rather how much

[39] Gary Hatfield, for example, includes Spinoza among those 'post-Cartesian rationalists of the seventeenth-century... [who] shared a core position on the cognitive faculties, which underlies their grouping as "rationalists"'. He attributes to him a division among ideas: '*sensory ideas* are simply one sort of idea found in the idea that constitutes the human mind - the sort that have as a bodily counterpart some activity in the liquid and soft parts of the body... whose current state... is partly caused by external objects', to be contrasted with '*purely intellectual idea*s'. Gary Hatfield, 'The Cognitive Faculties', in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 997-8, emphasis added.

[40] Descartes, *Meditations*, 'Third Set of Objections', p. 125, AT VII.178; Ibid. 'Fifth Set of Objections', p. 186, AT VII.266-7.

of the objective essence of the sun is grasped by a given person. In augmenting one's awareness of the nature of the sun, one can then *see* the sun in a cognitively enriched way. So the sensory and the intellectual are not opposed, even if they are at times 'out of joint'. The interplay between the experiential and the intellectual is most evident in the case of *scientia intuitiva*, which, in addition to the experience of immediately 'seeing' or grasping something, is also suffused with the intense experience of 'intellectual love [*amor intellectualis*]'.

The truth in the reading under consideration is that Spinoza did inherit elements of a tradition that could be broadly labelled as 'rationalist'. Like Plato and many after him, Spinoza was moved to provide a hierarchical valuation of distinct forms of cognition, and he reserved the pride of place in his hierarchy for an inherently intellectual form of cognition.[41] But the reading in question glosses all too quickly over what Spinoza himself actually says about the different kinds of cognition. It ignores the inclusion of the deliverances of 'hearsay' and 'report' within the first kind of cognition, neither of which seem obviously reducible to sensory perception or the 'dance of shadows' in the imagination. Because his conception of cognition is based on a perceptual model, and experiential across the board in perhaps an even stronger sense than that held by previous 'rationalist' philosophers, the distinctive feature of *experientia vaga* cannot be simply that it is a kind of experience (*experientia*). Rather, it must be that the experience involved is specifically of a 'wandering [*vaga*]', or, as many have rendered the Latin, 'random', kind. Experience *per se* need not imply a hopelessly degenerate mode of cognition, even if that experience is *sensory* experience. On the contrary, it has been convincingly shown by Moreau that Spinoza did not reduce *experientia* to *experientia vaga*.[42] Indeed, 'one of the strongest reasons why commentators have not been interested in experience', as it figures in Spinoza's philosophy, 'is without doubt its reduction to *experientia vaga*'.[43]

So the defining feature of the first kind of cognition, when it comes from experience, is just that it is in some sense 'errant' or 'random'. This explains what it has in common with cognition arising from 'hearsay' or 'report', an affiliation that may otherwise seem arbitrary. For in each case the person in question is blindly and

[41] I follow Maria Rosa Antognazza's history of the rationalist tradition, which, as far as such a broad term goes, can be shown to consist in a debt to certain key strands of Plato's thought. Maria Rosa Antognazza, 'Rationalism', in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 312-36.

[42] Moreau, *Spinoza*, p. 245 and *passim*.

[43] Ibid.

uncritically following what is suggested to him or her by a 'random' outside source in a whimsical (and potentially wayward) way. Cognition from experience, when defective, resembles a naïve trust in the reports of others, in unquestioningly accepting the way that surface appearances 'suggest' things to be, and, conversely, cognition from report resembles that from experience in gullibly accepting whatever one hears in the reports of others, as if through an unguarded sense (often, literally, through the sense of hearing). In both cases, what is problematic is not the experiential quality of the cognition, but the capricious and whimsical way in which one is led to view things without subjecting one's ideas to any critical scrutiny. This naïve submission to the 'random' influence of hearsay or anecdotal experience is - not coincidentally - parallel to our submission to our own passions, amidst which, 'like waves on the sea, driven by contrary winds, we toss about, not knowing our outcome and fate'.[44] For in fact this is the psychological aspect of the same condition of passivity, as is clear from Spinoza's definition of a 'passion', that is, an 'affect' of which we are not the 'adequate cause', but which is the effect of something outside ourselves, in conjunction with ourselves as only a 'partial cause'.[45] '[I]nsofar as the Mind has inadequate ideas, it necessarily undergoes certain things', and 'it follows that the Mind is more liable to passions the more it has inadequate ideas'.[46] The passivity (and lack of freedom) at the heart of both the cognitively wayward and the emotionally turbulent life, has been nicely put by Susan James:

> This constellation of interconnected states - being acted on, possessing inadequate ideas, experiencing affects or passions, being unfree - maps the limited and vulnerable condition that is basically ours. But Spinoza juxtaposes it with a contrasting state of being which serves to define human liberty.[47]

This, then, is the crucial point of difference between the first kind of cognition and those higher than it in Spinoza's hierarchy. That is, what constitutes cognition of the first kind, when it has yet to be enfolded by the higher kinds, is its unfiltered delivery of information from outside oneself, either from the verbal reports of others or from the impressions received through the senses. The power of 'report' or 'hearsay' to sway the beliefs and superstitions of people was indeed a concern close to Spinoza's heart. He was deeply troubled by how easily a crowd of people

---

[44] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p59s.

[45] Ibid. 3def3.

[46] Ibid. 3p1, 3p1c.

[47] Susan James, 'Power and Difference: Spinoza's Conception of Freedom', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 4, no. 3 (1996) p. 215.

could be won over to a certain belief or passion through rhetoric or spectacle. Denounced as heretical for questioning the blindly accepted authority of self-serving theologians and clergy, his polemic was no less directed at the manipulation of the multitude by a well-practised orator or politician. It is through such manipulation that a murderous mob would be incited by Orangists to kill Spinoza's fellow republicans, the de Witt brothers.[48] But the source of external influence need not be as sinister as this to be misleading, and may not involve any conscious contrivance at all, as in the more general case of the whimsical associations formed in the memory, or in being led by these associations to vacillate in regarding one or another thing as certain, and so ending up conceiving things as inherently contingent.

Activity of mind and resulting 'noetic union'

If passivity is the hallmark of the more precarious forms of cognition grouped into the first category, then activity must be the hallmark of those more reliable and truthful forms that belong to the second and third categories. This is indeed borne out in the text. The cognition that one has when 'the essence of a thing is inferred from another thing' is faithful to the essential connections within nature itself, but, consisting in one or more inferences, it is essentially an *act* of the mind. Again, I follow James' reading:

> Spinoza holds that when we make inferences from one adequate idea to another, we act. In acting, the mind exercises a capacity to generate ideas out of itself… When we think independently by initiating our own thoughts, "something in us or outside us follows from our own nature and can be clearly understood through it alone".[49]

In taking an active role in linking these ideas together, the intellect appeals to the interconnected essences of things themselves. Freely joining ideas together in this way, the true order of nature can be preserved, according to which the knowledge of an effect is to be grasped through knowledge of its cause, and not the other way around, as is liable to happen in the case of a wandering imagination.[50] For the

[48] Herbert H. Rowen, *John de Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland, 1625-1672* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 861-84.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1a4.

arbitrary associations of the imagination are not guaranteed to reflect the true order of nature, and in fact are prone to reflect more the point of view from which it has been conditioned, as illustrated by the example of the soldier and the farmer quoted above.

But certain ideas are given a more grounding or foundational status. In the *Ethics*, these ideas are called the 'common notions [*notiones communis*]', and are said to provide 'the foundations of our reasoning'.[51] An idea of this kind, which is of 'something which is common to all bodies, and which is equally in the part of each body and in the whole... can only be conceived adequately', because it 'will necessarily be adequate in God, both insofar as he has the idea of the human Body', i.e., the mind, 'and insofar as he has ideas of its affections', i.e., the mind's perceptions of external bodies.[52]

> From this it follows that there are certain ideas, *or* notions, common to all men. For (by l2) all bodies agree in certain things, which (by p38) must be perceived adequately, *or* clearly and distinctly, by all.[53]

From this foundation, the intellect is in a position to make inferences to other ideas, which, preserving the adequacy of the common notions from which they are inferred, are themselves adequate:

> For when we say that an idea in the human Mind follows from ideas that are adequate in it, we are saying nothing but that (by p11c) in the Divine intellect there is an idea of which God is the cause, not insofar as he is infinite… but insofar as he constitutes only the essence of the human Mind.[54]

Adequate cognition of the common notions, and of the ideas inferred from them, is therefore in both cases credited to the self-determination of the mind in question, or to its acting as an 'adequate cause'. Common notions, being 'adequate in God insofar as he constitutes the human Mind, *or* insofar as he has ideas that are in the human Mind', are actively and adequately conceived by that mind, whether it is considered *qua* 'part of the infinite intellect of God' or *qua* finite human mind, and ideas inferred in turn from common notions are even more clearly an achievement of the mind the question. These two ingredients of adequate cognition are grouped together into the 'second kind of cognition', called 'reason [*ratio*]'.

---

[51] Ibid. 2p40s1.

[52] Ibid. 2p38dem.

[53] Ibid. 2p38c.

[54] Ibid. 2p40dem.

From this perspective on the nature of *ratio*, two important points are worth noting. Firstly, it can be appreciated why an idea's adequacy is intimately bound up with its activity, and, conversely, why an idea's inadequacy involves a degree of passivity, relative to the finite human mind in question. With respect to God's mind, which is made up of the totality of ideas, all ideas are adequate and true. But when the reference point becomes an individual human mind, which is only a certain (complex) mode of that universal mind, the question arises for each idea perceived by that mind whether it is grasped in its entirety, or whether it is grasped only partially. Whereas adequate ideas are grasped exclusively through an activity of the mind that perceives them, inadequate ideas depend only partially on the mind that perceives them, and owe their existence partly to a mode of thought outside that constituting the individual mind. Secondly, when ideas are adequate in an individual human mind, for Spinoza, they are identical to the ideas in God's mind. Inadequate ideas, on the other hand, consist in no more than a partial or jumbled ('mutilated or confused') grasp of the ideas in God's mind. For it follows from the fact that a human mind is the idea of a human body that 'the human Mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God'.[55]

> Therefore, when we say that the human Mind perceives this or that, we are saying nothing but that God, not insofar [*quatenus*] as he is infinite, but insofar [*quatenus*] as he is explained through the nature of the human Mind, *or* insofar [*quatenus*] as he constitutes the essence of the human Mind, has this or that idea; and when we say that God has this or that idea, not only insofar [*quatenus*] as he constitutes the nature of the human Mind, but insofar as he also has the idea of another thing together with the human Mind, then we say that the human Mind perceives the thing only partially, *or* inadequately.[56]

Crucial to Spinoza's account here is the work being done by the adverb '*quatenus*'. This adverb invites a change of perspective, either to that of God, that of a human mind, or even that of a human mind *together* with another mode of thought outside it. From 'God's perspective' all ideas are adequate and true, but from the perspective of a human mind, only some ideas are adequate (in which case, they are identical to God's ideas as well as the ideas of anyone else who perceives them adequately). However, there are many ideas that, from the perspective of a particular human mind, are known only partially. In this case, the unknown part of these ideas is 'cut off [*mutilate*]' from the human mind in question, and consists partly in the existence

[55] Ibid. 2p11c.

[56] Ibid.

of modes of thought outside that mind. Therefore, owing to the parallelism of the attributes, there is for Spinoza a literal sense of a 'noetic union' between knower and known when ideas are adequate in a knower's mind.

It is this identity between our ideas and the ideas in God's mind that Spinoza refers to in the *Short Treatise*:

> All the effects of the intellect which are united with him are the most excellent, and must be valued above all others. For because they are internal effects, they are the most excellent of all; moreover, they must also be eternal, for their cause is eternal.[57]

These 'internal effects' are the fruits of the mind's own activity, expressed from 'within'. In becoming conscious of this noetic union with that which is known, one understands oneself under the same species of eternity under which one knows the thing in question. For this reason, the 'power of conceiving things under a species of eternity pertains to the Mind only insofar as it conceives the Body's essence under a species of eternity', that is, insofar as it conceives *itself* under this species of eternity.[58] There is thus a reciprocal relationship between conceiving things under a species of eternity and conceiving oneself under that same species.

Scientia intuitiva, intellectual love and the eternity of the mind

But if the second kind of cognition is, through an activity of mind, 'necessarily true', and therefore framed under a species of eternity in a way that involves the eternity of the mind, then on what basis does Spinoza differentiate the third kind of cognition? In virtue of what is the third kind of cognition, *scientia intuitiva*, more intimately involved in the 'intellectual love of God [*amor intellectualis dei*]' and the eternity of the mind? Spinoza explains that, from the 'third kind of knowledge… there arises the greatest satisfaction of Mind there can be (by p27), i.e. (by def. aff. xxv), Joy… accompanied by the idea of God, as its cause', which is 'what I call intellectual love of God':[59]

---

[57] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 148.

[58] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p29.

[59] Ibid. 5p32dem, 5p32c.

> Next, because (by p27) the highest satisfaction there can be arises from the third kind of knowledge [*ex tertio cognitionis*], it follows from this that the human Mind can be of such a nature that the part of the Mind which we have shown perishes with the body (see p21) is of no moment in relation to what remains.[60]

Although the second kind of cognition is capable of engendering a 'Striving, or Desire, to know things by the third kind of knowledge', it is only the third kind of knowledge that involves this intellectual love of God, the joy of which has the effect of reducing the gravitas of one's bodily demise to 'no moment'.[61] In order to explain why these special implications should follow from the third, but not the second, kind of cognition, it is necessary to appreciate the epistemological and ontological differences between them.

Although the second kind of cognition furnishes the mind with adequate ideas, which are 'necessarily true', it does so by following a sequence of ratiocinative steps that depends for its overall epistemic success on the truth of each constituent step in the sequence. There is thus a priority in grasping each of these individual steps, without which there could be no *ratio* that strings them together. In the case of *ratio*, one is capable of providing grounds or reasons for each constituent step of reasoning by pointing to that which immediately precedes it in the deductive chain. But in response to why each step should follow from that before, there can be no more justification than that it simply does. It must simply be 'seen' to do so. This bedrock of intelligibility therefore has to be grasped in a primitive way that is not amenable to further explication (at least by anything other than itself), because it is that which ultimately explains everything else. This is, for example, the kind of cognition that we have of the proportionality 'in the simplest numbers': Given 'the numbers 1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth proportional number is 6', a relation 'which, in one glance, we see the first number to have to the second'.[62] It is perhaps this that Spinoza meant by *scientia intuitiva*, the third kind of cognition, which should therefore not be thought of as a stage to which one proceeds *after* having acquired cognition of the second kind, but rather as a kind of cognition that is already implicated, and indeed on which there is a dependence, in the 'lower' kinds of cognition. This offers an explanation for something that has bothered many commentators, namely the apparent absence of any indication of how the third kind

[60] Ibid. 5p38s.

[61] Ibid. 5p28.

[62] Ibid. 2p40s2.

of knowledge might be acquired. For they have no doubt thought this to be problematic because they have thought of this kind of cognition as something achieved at some later stage than that of the second kind.

At this point, it is helpful to remember that Spinoza's central idea is that God or Nature is the single active principle unifying the totality of things into an individual substance. For this is really the metaphysical - and 'theological' - aspect of the epistemological point that has just been made. Like Aquinas, Spinoza understands the highest form of cognition - a kind of 'intuition' - to be the closest one can come to God. He takes the kind of transitive explicability constitutive of *ratio* to be dependent on intelligibility itself. But he also differs radically from Aquinas' more orthodox position in taking this principle of intelligibility to be the very activity of God, not as a transcendent, unexplained explainer, but as the immanent and unfolding rationality in Nature itself. Thus, for Spinoza, God or Nature, under its cognitive aspect, i.e. the attribute of thought, is intelligibility itself. Considered *qua natura naturata*, this invites an explanation of the existence of things in terms of their essence, which links them together in virtue of a shared participation in the same 'logical space'. Considered *qua natura naturans*, it invites an understanding of things as active and expressive, in virtue of that very same essence. The backward, explanatory, perspective, on the one hand, and the forward, emanative, perspective, on the other, are simply alternative ways of considering the same principle of intelligibility, insofar (*quatenus*) as one considers it from one point of view or the other. So when an individual human mind successfully grasps something in the clear and immediate way of *scientia intuitiva*, the resulting noetic union is with something far deeper than just some piece of the divine whole, some fragment of God or Nature *qua natura naturata*. It is a union with the all-unifying principle of intelligibility and activity itself. Combined with a conscious awareness of this union and the resulting sense of one's own eternity, this fills the knower with a sense of reverence for the whole with which, however briefly, one identifies.[63] That sense of delight is the intellectual love engendered by the third kind of knowledge, and it represents for Spinoza the highest fulfilment of human nature.[64]

---

[63] See, also, De Dijn, 'Spinoza on Knowledge and Religion'.

[64] Albert Einstein, whom I quoted at the head of this chapter, was once asked if he believed in God. He replied, 'I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the harmony of all that exists'. (Reported in the *The New York Times*, 25 April 1929). On another occasion, he described the sense of delight in grasping the more sublime workings of the universe as a 'cosmic religious feeling', and 'the

To know something under a species of eternity is to grasp its existence as determined from within, as an immanent (as opposed to a transitive) expression of the inherent power of God or Nature. Cognition *sub specie æternitatis* is literally, for Spinoza, to see the divinity in a thing's existence, with cognition of the third kind being a more fundamental grasp of this divine quality than cognition of the second kind, which, in fact, depends on that more fundamental cognition. Seeing a thing under this divine aspect insofar as it expresses its own true nature is thus what Spinoza means in his somewhat more recondite definition of *scientia intuitiva*: 'this kind of cognition proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [NS: formal] essence of things'.[65] Being 'tuned in' to God's attributes, as we are in the case of extension and thought, we are capable of those flashes of intellectual intuition in which we see that nature expressed through the self-determining nature of something expressed through the attributes. But in grasping the expression of a thing's nature in this way, we too are exercising our innermost nature as rational creatures, in such a way that our nature in a sense aligns with the nature of that which is known, jointly amounting to 'God's eternal and infinite intellect'.[66] In doing so, we ourselves express the necessity of God's eternal nature, and can be said to exist under that same aspect of necessity, which Spinoza calls 'a certain species of eternity'.

This explains why, for Spinoza, the more we know things through the third kind of cognition, the more our mind partakes of eternity, since eternity is necessary existence understood, not as determined by a transitive cause, but as self-determined from within, as the immanent expression of the nature of the thing in question, which is also an expression of God's nature. Eternity, for Spinoza, is thus really a kind of freedom, that is, a kind of self-determination. It can also now be appreciated why Spinoza elaborated a specifically *mind*-based eternity in *Ethics* V, since it is ultimately the mind, and in particular the intellect, through which human nature is most fully expressed and so also that through which we are at our most free. As noted above, the quality of existence Spinoza calls the 'eternity of the mind' is also deeply experiential, informed by an 'intellectual love' for the unifying activity and intelligibility of Nature, and appreciated reflectively through an intellectual insight of

---

strongest and noblest incitement to scientific research'. Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, ed. Carl Seelig (New York: Crown Publishers, 1954), p. 38 and *passim*.

[65] Ibid. 2p40s2.

[66] Ibid. 5p40s.

the mind which is itself a form of 'perception': '*we feel and know by experience* that we are eternal [*sentimus experimurque nos æternos esse*]. For the Mind feels those things that it conceives in understanding no less than those it has in the memory. For the eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes things, are the demonstrations themselves'.[67]

[67] Ibid. 5p23s, emphasis added. A similar passage appears in the *Theological-Political Treatise*: 'In the case of things invisible which are objects only of the mind, proofs are the only eyes by which they can be seen.' Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. 13, p. 155.

There is a bondage which is worse to bear
Than his who breathes, by roof, and floor, and wall,
Pent in, a Tyrant's solitary Thrall:
'Tis his who walks about in the open air,
One of a Nation who, henceforth, must wear
Their fetters in their Souls.

William Wordsworth

Chapter 6

Freedom

The survey of literature in Chapter 1 highlighted the great diversity of approaches, and the ingenuity, with which Spinoza's notion of the 'eternity of the mind' has been variously tackled. However, apart from one or two exceptions, there did not seem to be any approaches that have looked to his views on freedom in aid of this goal. I mentioned the observation made by Caird in 1888, that 'Spinoza's doctrine of immortality is, in one point of view, only another form of his doctrine of freedom', as well as Kisner's more recent suggestion that 'Spinoza's notion of salvation is arguably directed at our freedom, for it arises from union with the eternal, divine nature and, thus, offers a kind of liberation from the power of external forces.'[1] However, both writers were pursuing their own orthogonal direction of inquiry, Caird seemingly interested in casting this aspect of Spinoza's thought in a Hegelian, dialectical, mould, and Kisner concerned with Spinoza's views on freedom in all their rich complexity. It seems these intriguing hints were set aside to await further exploration. The path followed in this dissertation has now furnished an invitation to do just this. In Chapter 5, it was seen in what way the higher forms of cognition, in Spinoza's system, both engender and presuppose the special significance of the eternity of the mind, and it was found that the defining feature of these higher forms of cognition lies essentially in a quality of self-determination, or freedom. In the present chapter, this fundamental quality lying at the heart of both rational self-mastery and eternal life will be investigated more closely. After responding to an old

[1] Caird, *Spinoza*, p. 287; Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom*, p. 1.

yet persistent perception that Spinoza was in fact out to deny human freedom, this concept will be shown to be, not only one to which he was entitled, but one that in fact underlies and unifies the various different aspects that make up a desirable ethical condition, including, even, an aspect of 'deathlessness', or freedom from death.

Spinoza: enemy or champion of human freedom?

A familiar way of characterising Spinoza's philosophy is to point out that he begins with the notion of substance (which is shown to be equivalent, by his lights, to both God and Nature, '*Deus sive Natura*') and deduces the rest of his system from this starting point.[2] This order of priority is as much a programme for the *Ethics* to follow, as it is a metaphysical claim about the structure of reality, which after all is the 'original' to be 'reproduced':

> [I]t is again evident that for our mind to reproduce completely the likeness of Nature, it must bring all of its ideas forth from that idea which represents the source and origin of the whole of Nature, so that that idea is also the source of the other ideas.[3]

Unfolding in turn, and in *ordine geometrico*, from this starting point, are his metaphysics, psychology, ethics, politics, and his own unique brand of philosophical theology. But it is worth bearing in mind that these links in the chain are successive phases of a single unified work with the title '*Ethics*'. For it speaks of the rich inclusivity in Spinoza's conception of 'the ethical', as well as of the overall tenor of his philosophical ambitions. So, if his point of departure was indeed the metaphysical one of the nature of substance, then his final destination was the inherently ethical one of human freedom, as confirmed at the culmination of the work in its fifth and final part, 'which concerns the means, *or* way, leading to freedom [*quæ est de modo sive via, quæ ad libertatem ducit*]'.[4] The particular trajectory followed in the work is consciously directed towards this end, as he explains in the preface to *Ethics* II:

---

[2] The general shape of Spinoza's metaphysical picture was presented in Chapter 3, though with a special focus on the role played by 'attributes' and 'species'.

[3] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §42.

[4] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5pref.

> I pass now to explaining those things which must necessarily follow from the essence of God, *or* the infinite and eternal Being - not, indeed, all of them, for we have demonstrated (1p16) that infinitely many things must follow from it in infinitely many modes, but only those that can lead us, by the hand, as it were, to the knowledge of the human Mind and its highest blessedness [*ad Mentis humanæ ejusque summæ beatitudinis cognitionem*]'.[5]

This final destination - 'Freedom of Mind, *or* blessedness [*mentis libertas seu beatitudo*]' - is the same goal that Spinoza vowed to pursue in the opening passage of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, emerging from that existential crisis with a firm resolution:

> I came to the conclusion that, if only I could resolve, wholeheartedly, [to change my plan of life], I would be giving up certain evils for a certain good. For I saw that I was in the greatest danger, and that I was forced to seek a remedy with all my strength… like a man suffering from a fatal illness, who, foreseeing certain death unless he employs a remedy, is forced to seek it, however uncertain, with all his strength.[6]

But there is a serious justificatory challenge to be met. For the various kinds of freedom that Spinoza elaborates appear at first glance to be at odds with each other, with little more in common than the name. Even more pressingly, and historically the reason why Spinoza has, since his own time, been portrayed as the most uncompromising enemy and denier of human freedom, is the seeming preclusion of any such thing by his strict metaphysical determinism. This preclusion is already apparently enforced with the definition of freedom stipulated at the outset of the *Ethics*, in which the extension of the concept is strictly circumscribed: 'That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone'.[7] From this definition, it seems clear that human beings could not possibly meet the strict conditions necessary to qualify as truly free, since we are clearly not the cause of our own existence (*causa sui*), any more than we are the sole cause of our actions, being only finite inhabitants of a vast natural order, adrift in a world of endless transitive causation:

[5] Ibid. 2pref.

[6] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §7.

[7] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1def7.

> Every singular thing, *or* any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity.[8]

To imagine that we are free is a delusion resulting from the feeling that we are somehow exempt from this infinite natural series. It is one of the great myths that we are somehow exempt from this status, a kind of 'dominion within a dominion [*imperium in imperio*]':[9]

> [M]en think themselves free, because they are conscious of their volitions and their appetite, and do not think, even in their dreams, of the causes by which they are disposed to wanting and willing, because they are ignorant [of those causes].[10]

The only being that truly is *causa sui*, and determined to act by its nature alone, is God or Nature. So it follows that 'God alone is a free cause'.[11] The freedom we imagine ourselves to have is unfortunately only a mirage in a desert of fortune-swept dunes.

Having spurned the notion of 'free will', so integral to the prevailing Judaeo-Christian conception of agency and culpability, it is no wonder that Spinoza should have earned a lasting reputation as a dangerous and heretical denier of human freedom.[12] But if he was as unforgiving as this reputation suggests, then what is to be made of the positive pronouncements on human freedom scattered throughout his writings? Are we to temper his rhapsodic musings on 'the free man', his almost spiritual reverence for a certain 'Freedom of Mind, or blessedness', and his courageous defence of a *libertas philosophandi* with the proviso that, in the last analysis, each of these is only an illusion?[13] In addition to this apparent conflict between Spinoza's metaphysical determinism and his positive account of these forms of

[8] Ibid. 1p28.

[9] Ibid. 3pref.

[10] Ibid. 1app.

[11] Ibid. 1p17c.

[12] One of Spinoza's earliest biographers, Johannes Colerus, denounced his determinism and its apparently detrimental implications for freedom. As David Bell remarks, 'Colerus immediately brands Spinoza's determinism as pernicious', because a 'denial of absolute freedom was taken to be equivalent to a doctrine of "blind necessity" or fatalism which rendered vice and virtue, as well as human effort, meaningless'. Bell, *Spinoza in Germany*, p. 4.

[13] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p66s and *passim*; Ibid. 5pref.; Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, title page and *passim*.

human freedom, is the question of the relations among these various forms themselves. This latter question points to a tension potentially even more fractious than the other. After all, Spinoza was adamant that the freedom enjoyed by the ethically accomplished 'free man' will be the prize of only a rare few, since 'all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare', whereas the *libertas philosophandi* advocated in his political writings is clearly meant as a right to be enjoyed equally by all, by the 'multitude' no less than the lucky few who have mastered their passions, for 'in a free commonwealth every man may think as he pleases, and say what he thinks'.[14] These twin demands of theoretical consistency present any account of Spinoza's philosophy of freedom with an important justificatory task, but one that is all the more urgent for a dissertation in which this concept is to play so crucial a role in the interpretation of the 'eternity of the mind' beginning to come into view.

The unity in Spinoza's freedom(s)

Far from contradicting any genuine sense of human freedom, as many have complained, the definition of freedom at (1def7) is in fact the expression, in metaphysical terms, of what ultimately underlies and unifies all of Spinoza's various forms of freedom.[15] James has noted 'the republican antecedents of his analysis of freedom', and that 'the conception of liberty we have found rooted in his metaphysics is also central to his political philosophy'.[16] Appreciating the former is the key to explaining the latter. For Spinoza's own development, both personally and intellectually, was informed by a deep aversion to any form of oppressive or tyrannical regime, preferring instead the principles of rational statecraft and meritocratic government that had coalesced in the republican tradition. This becomes especially salient in the light of two key historical factors. The first concerns the nature of the historical circumstances in which Spinoza wrote, and

[14] Spinoza, *Ethics*, p42s; Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. 20, p. 222.

[15] In the following attempt to uncover a shared affinity among Spinoza's various remarks on human freedom, I am indebted to James' illuminating work on the topic. See, for example, James, 'Power and Difference'. I should mention that the value of this article extends beyond the specifically interpretative point that I am trying to make, speaking as it does to, among other things, the important debate around the possibility of a 'politics of difference'. See Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[16] Ibid. p. 209, note 4; p. 226.

particularly the political and religious conflict that had plagued Europe for centuries. The second concerns the nature of Spinoza's own education and intellectual development, and particularly the influence on his thought of certain writers of classical antiquity. I will address these two factors in turn.

Before the Asturian campaign to reclaim territory in the Iberian Peninsula, at a time when the Islamic state of Al-Andalus had reached its peak in the eighth century (extending as far north as Provence), people in the region enjoyed a period of relative tolerance and stability, in which a 'golden age' of Jewish culture could begin to flourish.[17] But it is clear from two surviving chronicles of the period that the wider geopolitical struggle had been invested with a decidedly religious and ideological significance.[18] The '*Reconquista*' that ensued over the following centuries was spurred on by this antagonism of religious affiliation, with strict and fundamentalist tendencies flaring up on both sides of the conflict. Spinoza's Sephardi ancestors, who until the thirteenth century had prospered under relatively tolerant conditions, began to suffer increasingly harsh treatment during this polarised clash between Christianity and Islam, each seeking to assert its own strict authority over those in its domain. This fundamentalism and intolerance mounted, until Islamic mobs massacred the Jewish population of Granada in 1066 and their Christian counterparts carried out their own massacres of Iberian Jews in almost every major city in the region in 1391, with half of the survivors being compelled to convert to Christianity over the following century. This persecution reached its tragic peak when Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon issued the 'Alhambra Decree' in 1492, ordering the expulsion of all remaining Jews on pain of death without trial, giving the already established *Tribunal del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición* the dreadful appointment for which it would become so feared. The following century would of course usher in the fateful events of the Reformation, splitting Europe into inimical denominational factions and sparking the 'wars of religion' that would continue to ravage the continent well into Spinoza's time.

Having grown up learning of the suffering inflicted on his Jewish ancestors under the Spanish Inquisition, Spinoza was deeply attuned to the darker tendencies of an oppressive society. He was thankful for the freedom that his people could now enjoy in their adopted Amsterdam:

---

[17] See Jonathan Ray, *The Sephardic Frontier: The Reconquista and the Jewish Community in Medieval Iberia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

[18] These are the *Crónica mozárabe* of 754, and the late ninth-century *Crónica de Alfonso III*.

> Take the city of Amsterdam, which enjoys the fruits of this freedom, to its own considerable prosperity and the admiration of the world. In this flourishing state, a city of the highest renown, men of every race and sect live in complete harmony.[19]

But even in this liberal haven, Spinoza himself was to experience the vitriol of intolerance - and from his own people - when for 'horrible heresies' and 'monstrous actions' he was issued with a famously scathing and irrevocable *cherem*, effectively 'excommunicating' him from the community in which he had grown up:

> [N]obody should communicate with him orally or in writing, or show him any favour, or stay with him under the same roof, or come within four ells of him, or read anything composed or written by him.[20]

As it happens, Spinoza claimed to welcome this turn of events:

> All the better; they do not force me to do anything I would not have done of my own accord if I did not dread scandal; but, since they want it that way, I enter gladly on the path that is opened to me, with the consolation that my departure will be more innocent than was the exodus of the early Hebrews from Egypt.[21]

But even if he welcomed the prospect of pursuing a life free of the constraints imposed on him by the rabbis in Amsterdam, he undoubtedly would have felt a deep sense of trepidation, if not shame, at the severity of the terms with which he had been cast out from among his own brethren. In any case, he need not have succumbed to this natural emotion for him to take away from this experience a profound appreciation for the value of religious and political tolerance that the fundamental liberty to 'think as one pleases, and say what one thinks' stood to enshrine.

Aside from his own personal experience of exile, he was also keenly aware of the fragility of the freedom generally enjoyed in 'this flourishing state', in light of the extremely delicate theological-political situation. He understood that the celebrated tolerance and liberty of the Dutch Republic were delicate and hard-won privileges, not to be taken for granted, but to be protected at all costs from the looming spectre of oppression and tyranny. Recent history made this all too clear. For, as recently as the 1610s, there had been a violent illustration of just how precarious the peace and stability of the young republic really was. The upheaval in question unfolded when

---

[19] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. 20, p. 228.

[20] In the *Livro dos Acordos* of the Jewish-Portuguese community.

[21] Abraham Wolf, *The Oldest Biography of Spinoza* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927) p. 51.

the republican statesman Johan van Oldenbarneveldt and the Estates of Holland deemed it necessary to intervene in a religious dispute between the conservative Calvinist theologian Franciscus Gomarus and his reforming adversary Jacobus Arminius, after the latter and his followers had begun to suffer persecution from the Gomarists, who were in the majority. Maurice, Prince of Orange, seeing the political advantage to be gained from the theological rift, sided with the Gomarists and used their power in numbers to overthrow Oldenbarneveldt, having him executed and reasserting the House of Orange's dynastic control over the country.[22] From then onwards the political situation in the United Provinces would be inextricably bound up with questions of theological affiliation, with an alliance between a strict form of Calvinism and the dynastic *stadhouders*, on the one hand, and a loose affinity between religious pluralism and the kind of republicanism favoured by the more liberal regent and mercantile classes, on the other.

Spinoza and his circle of freethinkers were well aware of this recent political history, and especially of the latent and volatile mixture of religious and political opposition. Indeed these concerns, further intensified by the growing hostility between 'Orangists' and the States party during the war with England in the 1660's, were a principal motivation for writing the *Theological-Political Treatise*. Animating this powerful text is a deep-seated concern with freedom, informed by a close reading of the ancients. He and his circle had been introduced to the texts of authors such as Seneca and Cicero under the Latin tutelage of Franciscus van den Enden, himself a revolutionary activist who would later be executed at the Bastille for plotting to overthrow Louis XIV and install a republic in Normandy. Aside from their teacher's radical politics, this course of study made available to them a rich store of ancient ideas (not least those of the Stoic tradition), and an appreciation of the wider cultural institutions of antiquity, such as the civic origins behind the ancient Greek notion of 'freedom [*eleutheria*]'. For in ancient Greece the word '*eleutheria*' was originally used in a civic capacity, conferring on an individual the status of citizenship. Slaves did not have this kind of stake in society, so the opposite of 'freedom' simply meant slavery and servitude. Underlying the pair of terms, 'slavery' and 'freedom' was ultimately the difference between heteronomy, or being under the

[22] Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

authority of another, and autonomy, or being under the authority of oneself (such that '*libertas*' could later be defined as *'sui iuris*' in Justinian's influential *Roman Digest*).[23]

With this idea of self-determination behind the originally political distinction between 'slaves' and 'citizens', the Stoics were able to introduce the meaning of the term 'freedom' to new contexts. It was observed that, just as being conquered by an enemy state could turn a nation of subjects into a nation of slaves, so too the subjects of a nation ruled tyrannically could be understood as no better off than slaves, living as they do under the arbitrary power of another. This idea, in particular, would have brought to mind, for Spinoza and his circle, the ominous threat of arbitrary subjugation to the House of Orange.[24] But, in addition to these external senses of freedom, there was also a clear application to the life of the mind. So this originally external sense of freedom from physical tyranny and slavery segued to the internal sense of psychological or spiritual freedom from one's own passions, or from one's own desires for external, material things. Underlying this - originally metaphorical - use of the term 'freedom' is an implicit distinction between one's 'true nature' and those aspects of one's psychology whose effects are like an oppressive assault from something outside oneself. While for the Stoics this inner form of freedom was one feature among many enjoyed by the ethically accomplished Sage, for Spinoza it was of such importance that he made it into the sobriquet for his counterpart to the Stoic Sage, 'the free man [*homo liber*]'.[25] But, as will emerge in what follows, Spinoza's 'free man' is free, not only in these political and psychological senses, but in all the different senses that together make up his rich conception of 'the ethical'.

Both the original civic notion of freedom and the Stoic application of it to the life of the mind can be clearly discerned as central themes in Spinoza's thought.

---

[23] Justin Steinberg, 'Spinoza on being *sui iuris* and the Republican Conception of Liberty', *History of European Ideas*, 34, no. 3 (2008), pp. 239-49.

[24] But Spinoza's political thought should be seen to go beyond any simple opposition to monarchic or absolutist forms of government. Grounding his political philosophy in metaphysics, and making power the ultimate unit of analysis, Spinoza's intervention is as much a critique of the complacent, theory-bound, republicanism with which he sympathised, as it is of the opposing 'Orangist' faction. Ètienne Balibar has brought to light this radical strand in Spinoza's political thought and the warning it implicitly contained of the inevitable rise of a mass movement that, dissatisfied with the limitations and self-serving hypocrisy of these 'republican' rulers (in reality concerned more with the success of their own business ventures), would in 1672 side with the only other alternative and topple the Republic, reinstating the dynastic rule of the House of Orange: 'It is hardly surprising, then, that the TTP, which was written without any "revolutionary intention", seemed not only subversive to Spinoza's opponents, but more embarrassing than useful to his friends.' Ètienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowdon (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 3-4.

[25] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p66s and *passim*.

Given the historical and political landscape in which he found himself, it becomes clear why this essential quality of self-determination, and especially in its original and raw form of political or civic autonomy, should resonate so deeply with him. This was the notion that unified, for the Stoics, both the external, political sense of freedom, and the extension of the term to an inner mastery of one's own emotions or psychology generally. Spinoza can be read as having endorsed this fundamental and unifying conception in his own development and formulation of what is essentially a philosophy of freedom. This core notion of self-determination is what lies at the heart of the ethical fulfilment Spinoza advocates, whether this is attained through the 'rebirth' described in the *Short Treatise* or through the ongoing conative process described in the *Ethics*. And it is really this notion of autonomy or self-determination that one finds expressed in the metaphysical definition that has seemed to so many to preclude or problematise human freedom. For that which 'exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone', is that which, or someone who, can be said to have attained (some measure of) autonomy, self-determination, or, in other words, freedom.[26] To illustrate the way in which this core notion informs each of Spinoza's various kinds of freedom, and unifies them into a single condition of ethical fulfilment, I will now consider some of the principal kinds in turn.

Epistemic freedom

Freedom in its epistemic guise was explored in Chapter 5. An epistemically unfree person is someone who is not the author, or at least reflective judge, of his or her thoughts. It is the situation of a person whose cognitive life is ruled by the imagination, without the active collaboration of *ratio* and *scientia intuitiva*. This leads to an uncritical exposure to the accidental relations among things, which are replicated in one's associative faculties, or to the influence of 'hearsay', or perhaps a more sinister source of (mis-)information. In his own day and since, Spinoza's brave and rebellious stance has always consisted in his defiance of those who have shored up their positions of power through the promulgation of narratives justifying their

[26] Ibid. 1def7.

own authority and the subservience of others. Whether through an entrenched mechanism of religious intolerance, through an absolutist grip on political power, or through the more fleet-footed and opportunistic manipulation of an angry crowd of people, Spinoza saw the risk of epistemic coercion to be a profound danger standing in the way of his ethical quest.

But, as discussed in Chapter 5, there need be no contrivance at all behind the deleterious situation of epistemic captivity. This is after all the natural tendency of the associative faculties in lieu of being enfolded by the higher, rational ones. Where this form of captivity is at its most insidious is in the spread of 'superstition [*superstitio*]', doubly dangerous when propaganda dealt out by politicians and clerics is met with welcome enthusiasm by a gullible public, and especially when it plays on the most seductive of passions, hope and fear:

> We may add to this that these affects show a defect of knowledge and a lack of power in the Mind… Therefore, the more we strive to live according to the guidance of reason, the more we strive to depend less on Hope, to free ourselves from Fear, to conquer fortune as much as we can and to direct our actions by the certain counsel of reason.[27]

The passions of hope and fear tend to be exploited by those in power in order to control, and potentially manipulate, an unruly 'multitude'. For '[t]he mob is terrifying, if unafraid'.[28] Through the promise of reward, and, especially, the threat of punishment, an unpredictable and impassioned mass of people will, in their own interests, remain with certain boundaries of self-control. This tool for social conditioning is then finally applied on a sublime and cosmic scale, holding out the promise of bliss in the hereafter, or the threat of fiery torment. Spinoza, in his more Machiavellian moments, seemed to acknowledge the utility in this ploy, both in its mundane and more cosmic application, but he of course regarded it as a form of captivity to be overcome by those who have it in themselves to do so.

He or she attains epistemic freedom through the exercise of an inner capacity for active perception, thought and reflection. Spinoza groups these forms of rational activity under the rubric, 'following the guidance of reason', though this metaphor may not be the most apt, suggesting as it does an adherence to some outside influence (i.e., the 'guidance'). But, of course, the 'guidance of reason' issues from within, as an immanent expression of the natural human capacity for adequate

[27] Ibid. 4p37s.

[28] Ibid. 4p54s.

knowledge. In expressing this nature, one becomes a 'free man', rid of the shackles of superstition and false dogma.

> [T]he Mind has, not an adequate, but only a confused [NS: and mutilated] knowledge, of itself, of its own Body, and of external bodies, so long as it perceives things from the common order of nature [*ordo naturæ communis*], i.e., so long as it is *determined externally*, from fortuitous encounters with things, to regard this or that, and not so long as it is *determined internally*… For so often as it is *disposed internally*, in this or another way, then it regards things clearly and distinctly.[29]

Psychological freedom

Psychological captivity is really the same condition as epistemic captivity, only considered under its psychological aspect. Spinoza contrasts the condition of 'one who is led by reason', with that of one 'who is led only by an affect, or [*sive*] by opinion'.[30] This latter person is led by 'an affect' to the same extent that he or she is led by 'opinion'. After all, 'a Passion of the mind is a confused idea', because 'we have shown (3p3) that the Mind is acted on only insofar as it has inadequate, or [*sive*] confused ideas'.[31] In locating the source of psychological discord in the effects of our own emotions, whose diverse interaction and combination elude any immediate or straightforward awareness, Spinoza was endorsing a generally Stoic line of thought. But in recommending a process of bringing the hidden roots of these emotions to light as a possible remedy, he was also anticipating the developments of psychoanalysis to follow three centuries later:

> An affect which is a passion is a confused idea (by gen. def. aff.). Therefore, if we should form a clear and distinct idea of the affect itself, this idea will only be distinguished by reason from the affect itself… Therefore (by 3p3), the affect will cease to be a passion…
>
> Cor.: The more an affect is known to us, then, the more it is in our power, and the less the Mind is acted on by it.[32]

It is perhaps unsurprising that this aspect of Spinoza's project has received more attention than any other, with the very structure of the *Ethics* apparently shaped by

---

[29] Ibid. 2p29s.

[30] Ibid. 4p66s.

[31] Ibid. Part III, 'General Definition of the Affects'.

[32] Ibid. 5p3dem, 5p3c.

it. It seems fairly straightforward that the sequence of the work progresses from a necessary grounding in the metaphysics of substance and the philosophy of mind in Parts I and II, to a general anatomy (or physiology) of the 'affects' in Part III, then to an account of the tendency that they have to hold us in a state of 'bondage' in Part IV, culminating in a therapeutic strategy for overcoming this state of psychological discord in Part V. In this way, many have interpreted Spinoza's understanding of 'the ethical' along broadly Stoical lines, as concerned with the attainment of a general state of tranquility (*ataraxia*) and a kind of harmony with the natural world around one, but some, in doing so, have marginalised, perhaps, the more 'spiritual' aspects of his thought, subsuming them under a purely psychological or therapeutic project. But although such approaches risk reducing these other important aspects of Spinoza's 'ethics' to the psychological, it is undoubtedly true that the attainment of a calm and harmonious relationship with the world was of great importance to him.

Spinoza articulates this process of psychological remediation with the language of 'bondage [*servitute*]' and 'freedom [*libertas*]'. But aside from having an intuitively plausible ring to it, what are the philosophical grounds for regarding this kind of disruption as a form of 'bondage', and its converse, equanimity, as a form of 'freedom'? Affects, for Spinoza, are 'affections of the Body by which the Body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections'.[33] It is a general category, which includes both 'actions' and 'passions': 'if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I understand by the Affect an action; otherwise, a passion'.[34] An 'adequate' cause is one 'whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it', by which Spinoza means that the effect issues exclusively from that cause, while a 'partial, *or* inadequate' cause is one whose 'effect cannot be understood through it alone', which, conversely, is to say that the effect depends on more than the partial cause to come about.[35]

Considered under the attribute of thought, a passion 'increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our Mind's power of thinking'.[36] If the former, the passion is

[33] Ibid. 3def3.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid. 3def1.

[36] Ibid. 3p11.

understood as a 'joy [*lætitia*]', if the latter, a 'sadness [*tristitia*]'.[37] Together with 'desire [*cupiditas*]', understood as 'appetite together with consciousness of the appetite', i.e. that 'striving [*conatus*]' to persevere in one's being which every individual thing has, these are the basic ingredients of our emotional life.[38] From their complex permutation, combination, and recursion, arise the many different emotions and states of mind, from jealousy to shame, from avarice to ambition. From a metaphysical perspective, it is clear why a passionate life is one of subjugation. For the metaphysics of a passionate life, by definition, describes a situation in which one is at the mercy of a causal arrangement that goes beyond one's own causal agency, without any control over the coming and going of successive emotions. Indeed, by Spinoza's definition at (3def3), such effects cannot even qualify as actions, let alone actions that can be attributed to a free agent, which, to be free, must be 'determined to act by itself alone'.[39]

> And with this I think I have explained and shown through their first causes the main affects and vacillations of the mind which arise from the composition of the three primitive affects, viz. Desire, Joy, and Sadness. From what has been said it is clear that we are driven about in many ways by external causes, and that, like waves on the sea, driven by contrary winds, we toss about, not knowing our outcome and fate.[40]

Political freedom

Throughout Spinoza's overtly political writings, freedom is consistently upheld as the principal value and purpose of the state. This is explicitly maintained in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, in which he declares that 'the purpose of the state is, in reality, freedom'.[41] And it is true even of the *Political Treatise*, in which he appears, on the contrary, to say that 'the purpose of civil order... is nothing other than peace and security of life [*pax vitæque securitas*]'.[42] For following this remark, and opposing

[37] Ibid. 3p11s.

[38] Ibid. 3p6, 3p9s.

[39] Ibid. 1def7.

[40] Ibid. 3p59s.

[41] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. 20, p. 223.

[42] Benedictus de Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, vol. III, *Opera* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925), ch. 5, p. 294. Translations of this text, unless otherwise stated, are from *Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000).

Hobbes, for whom peace is the 'absence of war', he explains that true peace, in turn, must allow for the rational expression of the polity:

> For peace is not just the absence of war, but a virtue which comes from strength of mind… Anyway, a commonwealth whose peace depends on the sluggish spirit of its subjects who are led like sheep to learn simply to be slaves can more properly be called a desert than a commonwealth.[43]

Thus, as Isaiah Berlin recognised, Spinoza's conception of freedom is inherently more than 'negative liberty', or a libertarian conception defined principally in terms of the absence of coercion or restraint.[44] For Spinoza's freedom is indeed about human potential and its fulfillment, about a 'true nature' with which we struggle to align ourselves. However, this need not render him guilty of the dangerous tendencies that Berlin saw in such a conception. Indeed, Spinoza's political philosophy could be said to offer a compelling middle path between the excesses of both left and right wings of Berlin's spectrum. A society whose rationality is obstructed by forms of epistemic coercion, whether through state-sponsored propaganda or an educational policy subservient to a particular economic interest-group, is kept, to some extent, from expressing its full potential, even if its citizens are 'free' to indulge whichever desires the prevailing narrative occasions in them. But the alternative is not to entrust a potentially tyrannical ruling elite, a coterie of 'philosopher kings', with the task of redirecting these models of living in a more 'humane', or 'rational', way.[45] Indeed, it would be an absurdity, on Spinoza's view, to 'force someone to be free', in Rousseau's famous phrase, since rationality and freedom can issue only from within.[46]

But the minimal conditions for this possibility of self-determination must be vouchsafed, for the good of the sovereign no less than that of the polis. For an

---

[43] Ibid. ch. 5, p. 62.

[44] Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), pp. 31-2.

[45] For a classic exposition of the liberalist strands in Spinoza's thought, and especially as these issue from his sympathies for the republican tradition, see Lewis S. Feuer, *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958). For an exoneration of Spinoza of some of the negative implications of a 'positive' conception of liberty, see David West, 'Spinoza on Positive Freedom', *Political Studies* 41, no. 2 (1993), 284-96.

[46] There is another point on which the two thinkers diverge. Whereas Rousseau famously remarked that 'man is born free, yet everywhere he is in chains', Spinoza seems to think that a person is not free when born, but frees him or herself, to some degree, through a process of rational self-determination, which requires the attainment of a certain maturity. At (4p68), Spinoza says, hypothetically, 'If men were born free, they would form no concept of good and evil so long as they remained free'. But, in the accompanying scholium he adds, 'It is evident from (p4) that the hypothesis of this proposition is false'. Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p68, 4p68s.

attempt to stifle the natural tendency people have to form their own thoughts and share them with others, 'even when secrecy is needed', will only be met with resistance, and will in some cases 'turn the devotion of the masses into a rage, inciting them against whomsoever they will'.[47] But these conditions can guarantee at most the 'virtual' enjoyment of freedom, its realisation depending ultimately on each individual *conatus*. To the extent that an individual achieves this kind of liberty, the aims and interests encompassed in his or her *conatus* will align with those of others who, similarly, have achieved some degree of freedom. James describes the 'virtuality' of this freedom as a kind of 'simulacrum', or 'the next best thing' to freedom itself:

> So although the State *cannot make people free* by imposing the relevant kinds of similarity [i.e. some degree of rationality], it aims to create the next best thing - a simulacrum of a free community in which difference, though present, is manifested in the similarities that promote the common good.[48]

The 'similarities that promote the common good' would include institutions and resources that enable citizens to realise their rational potential, such as state education, suitable forums for debate, as well as the apparatus of civic engagement itself, including a constitution, judiciary and political representation. '[T]heir transition to freedom - when it occurs - is a passage to an ideal kind of citizenship.'[49] So, while Spinoza did not propose anything like Hegel's teleological account of the state - to be realised through an inner tendency towards communal rationality - he did acknowledge the potential for differing approximations to this shared political goal, while never losing sight of the natural - and volatile - dynamics of power.

The peace and stability, which Hobbes took to be the *raison d'être* of the state, could in theory be secured through the negative conditions of fear and superstition, without providing the conditions for the expression of that which is specifically human about human nature. It is against this minimal and potentially unfree state of 'peace' and security, that Spinoza issued his warning about the true purpose of the state:

> It is not, I repeat, the purpose of the state to transform men from rational beings into beasts or puppets, but rather to enable them to develop their mental and physical faculties in safety, to use their reason without restraint and

[47] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise,* ch. 20, pp. 223, 227.

[48] Susan James, 'Power and Difference,' p. 208, emphasis added.

[49] Ibid.

> to refrain from the strife and the vicious mutual abuse that are prompted by hatred, anger or deceit. Thus the purpose of the state is, in reality, freedom.[50]

In the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza calls this 'a human life, which is characterised not just by the circulation of the blood and other features common to all animals, but especially by reason, the true virtue and life of the mind'.[51]

The relationship between the right of the sovereign and the freedom of the individual works both ways. For not only did Spinoza aim to show that the true purpose of the state is freedom, and that 'this freedom can be granted without detriment to public peace or to the right of civil authorities', but also, crucially, that it 'cannot be withheld without great danger to peace and grave harm to the entire commonwealth'.[52] Spinoza's argument for this converse dependence of the survival of the state on its recognition of the freedom of the individual is grounded in his theory of natural right:

> For example, fish are determined by nature to swim, and the big ones to eat the smaller ones. For it is certain that Nature, taken in the absolute sense, has the sovereign right to do all that she can do; that is, Nature's right is co-extensive with her power.[53]

In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, this account of natural right lays the foundations for a kind of social contract theory in the Hobbesian mould:[54]

> [T]here is nobody who does not desire to live in safety free from fear, as far as is possible. But this cannot come about as long as every individual is permitted to do just as he pleases… For there is no one whose life is free from anxiety in the midst of feuds, hatred, anger and deceit, and who will not therefore try to avoid these as far as in him lies… [Thus] in order to achieve a secure and good life, men had necessarily to unite in one body… and the unrestricted right naturally possessed by each individual should be put into common ownership.[55]

But the power of the sovereign, in which the collected natural right is concentrated and embodied, must, for its own preservation, be administered reasonably. For the more oppressive or stifling it becomes, the less it will be fulfilling

---

[50] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. 20, p. 223.

[51] Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, p. 62.

[52] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, preface, p. 7.

[53] Ibid. ch. 16, p. 173.

[54] Although it is uncertain whether or not Spinoza had read a Dutch translation of Hobbes' *Leviathon* that had been published in Amsterdam in 1651, it seems clear that he had at least read *De Cive*, a copy of which was found in his library.

[55] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. 16, p. 175.

its purpose, and the less disposed will its subjects be towards upholding it as an institution.

> As we have shown, sovereign powers possess the right of commanding whatever they will only for as long as they do in fact hold supreme power... Therefore it is exceedingly rare for governments to issue quite unreasonable commands; in their own interest and to retain their rule, it especially behoves them to look to the public good and to conduct all affairs under the guidance of reason. For, as Seneca says, "*violenta imperia nemo continuit diu*" - tyrannical governments never last long.[56]

Thus freedom in its fullest human sense must be upheld by the state for the sake of its own longevity.

But what is meant by freedom in this full sense? As mentioned above, Spinoza understands freedom to be more than the mere absence of coercion or restraint. Just as the social contract theory of the *Theological-Political Treatise* begins from the theory of natural right, so too does the next step of the argument begin from a careful fidelity to the nature of things. Because human nature aspires to express itself through 'the life of the mind', which includes entertaining and assenting to thoughts, sharing these thoughts with others, and organising these thoughts with the faculty of reason, this nature must be given the space it needs to express itself and flourish within a state. Disregarding this fact of nature is like a foolish resistance to the inexorable course of nature, like trying to swim against the current, and leaves any sovereign power in a dangerously precarious position. Unduly restricting these tendencies of human nature is to attempt to constrain the power of nature itself, a power that will as much as possible strive to break out of any restrictive conditions imposed on it. This fidelity to the concrete reality of power and its constitutive conditions marks a Machiavellian realism in Spinoza's political thought, which was consciously directed away from speculative abstractions and directed instead towards the practical exigency of things. For he was concerned that, for all the noble intentions of speculative political theory, it had not generally endeavoured enough to engage with the practical realities of human nature, tending to produce a scheme 'that borders on fantasy or could be put into effect in Utopia or in that golden age of the poets where there would naturally be no need of such.'[57]

It is simply a fact of nature that opinions vary, and that people cannot help expressing them. 'It is the common failing of men to confide what they think to

[56] Ibid. ch. 16, pp. 177-8.

[57] Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, ch. 1, p. 33.

others, even when secrecy is needed', and not even 'men well versed in affairs can keep silent'.[58] It would thus be to try and stifle the expression of nature itself, to oppose an un-opposable force, were a state to try and control people's thoughts or even their expression of them. Any statesman, whether their motives are noble or not, must accept this fact of nature as given and reckon with it accordingly. Failure to recognise and to provide for it will only result in a precarious and unstable state, a situation not in the interests of anyone, least of all the sovereign:

> On the contrary, the greater the effort to deprive them of freedom of speech, the more obstinately do they resist: not indeed the greedy, the flatterers and other poor-spirited souls who find their greatest happiness in gloating over their money-bags and cramming their bellies, but those to whom a good upbringing, integrity and a virtuous disposition have given a more liberal outlook… In consequence, they are emboldened to denounce the laws and go to all lengths to oppose the magistrate.[59]

So determined will the resistance of nature be, that opponents and dissidents will be willing to die in the struggle for freedom:

> Those who are conscious of their own probity do not fear death as criminals do, nor do they beg for mercy, for they are not tormented with remorse for shameful deeds. On the contrary, they think it an honour, not a punishment, to die in a good cause, and a glorious thing to die for freedom.[60]

Freedom from death

In *Ethics* IV, Spinoza demonstrates that a 'free man thinks of nothing less than of death', and that 'his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death'.[61] This proposition comes in the midst of the excursus on 'the free man', that ideal citizen who 'lives according to the dictate of reason alone'.[62] As was found in the previous chapter on cognition, the exercise of reason is an activity of mind and an expression of human nature, and so a free, self-determined act. In ordering one's mental life according to this rational principle, one is affected less by the 'random' influence of outside sources of belief, and less also by the 'passions' (those same effects considered

[58] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. 20, p. 223.

[59] Ibid. ch. 20, p. 226.

[60] Ibid. ch. 20, p. 227.

[61] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p67.

[62] Ibid. 4p67dem.

psychologically). One of these effects from which one frees oneself is the emotion of fear, and *inter alia* the irrational fear of something for which there is no positive reality, namely death. Spinoza combines this Epicurean critique of the fear of death with the point that, as a rational person, 'the free man' is concerned only with 'the good directly... and preserves his being from the foundation of seeking his own advantage', and is thus concerned only with what is positive and real, that is, 'his wisdom is a meditation on life'.[63]

But freedom from death cannot simply be subsumed under the general heading of 'psychological freedom', as elaborated above. It is rather, for Spinoza, a substantive existential condition to which 'the free man' aspires. Just as the First Letter of John speaks of a choice between 'abiding in death' or having 'eternal life' inside oneself, depending on whether one has love in one's heart, Spinoza makes 'choosing life over death' a matter of the *way* in which one lives. In particular, this way of life is that of someone who has come - to some extent - to determine his or her own existence in accordance with the insights won through an active use of reason. For if one applies oneself in this manner, then, Spinoza thinks, one will eventually arrive at the same demonstrations that have been compiled in the *Ethics*. At this point of one's philosophical awakening, one will realise that 'death' is a misleading noun, suggesting reality where there is none, since it can in fact amount to no more than a 'privation' or an 'absence', neither of which has anything positive in it. Understanding that reality is perfection itself, and that ascriptions of 'deficiency', 'imperfection', or 'privation', reflect only a partial and limited viewpoint, one will focus one's attention instead on that which is in fact real, that is, on life - God or Nature - itself. Sylvain Zac has put this succinctly, explaining that, for Spinoza, 'God is life itself', and that 'eternity is an "eternity of life" and not an "eternity of death"'.[64]

So, far from not being entitled to a genuine notion of human freedom, this notion in fact underlies the many diverse dimensions of the ethical condition that Spinoza identifies as the goal of human existence. Freedom, eternity, and 'choosing life' all coalesce in this ethically rich state of human flourishing. However, even if we grant all of this, there still remains a glaring aporia in the account. For in what sense

[63] Ibid.

[64] Zac, *L'idée de vie*, p. 15, translation my own.

can Spinoza still claim that 'something' of our eternal selves 'remains' after the death of the body?

¿Cuánto vive el hombre, por fin?
¿Vive mil días o uno solo?
¿Una semana o varios siglos?
¿Por cuánto tiempo muere el hombre?
¿Qué quiere decir 'Para Siempre'?

Pablo Neruda

Chapter 7
'Superficial' vs. 'Authentic'

In the previous chapter, it was found that ethical fulfilment, for Spinoza, amounts to a rich and manifold condition of human freedom. In the *Short Treatise*, this condition is presented as coming about through a 'road to Damascus' episode, or 'rebirth', while in the *Ethics*, it seems to be more a matter of degree, admitting of shades and approximations, either closer towards, or further away from, an unobtainable ideal. Nevertheless, the qualities included in this condition are in both works more or less the same. They include knowledge, love for others, love for God or Nature, as well as a certain existential orientation towards human mortality. In the *Ethics*, the further one strays from this ideal condition, the less one acts in accordance with one's true nature, the less one is disposed to act out of love for others, and the less one has reconciled oneself to death. Only when life has been freely 'chosen' over death, on this conception, can one live a life free of the angst occasioned by its looming inevitability. Freeing oneself from death in this way is a matter both of how one grasps things intellectually and how this knowledge is expressed in a way of life. For Spinoza, there is no 'gap' between the ontological and the epistemological; both are complimentary aspects of the same reality. Therefore, in addition to the question as to whether one grasps things only 'superficially [*superficialiter*]' or as they are 'really [*realiter*]', there is also a complimentary question as to whether one lives 'superficially' or in a more 'authentic' manner. In this chapter, I will explore this opposition, which Spinoza implicitly offers in place of the traditional philosophical opposition between 'appearance' and 'reality'. Unlike transcendental philosophical frameworks, under which an epistemological 'world of appearance' is thought to be somehow detached

from an ontological 'world of reality', Spinoza's immanentist alternative allows the 'same world' to be lived in and grasped in different ways, some more 'authentic', some more 'superficial', depending on the degree of one's activity or passivity. Those aspects of our lives that are, in this sense, 'authentic', can also be said to 'remain' (in a way that 'superficial' aspects do not) within an overall conception of things *sub specie æternitatis*.

Where ought the line be drawn?

It has seemed self-evident to many over the ages that there must be, somewhere in Spinoza's philosophical system, a line to be drawn between that which is real and that which only appears to be real but does not have an ontological standing of its own. In fact, one such partitioning has already been encountered in this dissertation. During the discussion of 'attributes' in Chapter 3, the old debate concerning their ontological status was briefly rehearsed. The so-called 'subjectivist' side of the debate insists that the attributes are a set of subjective prisms through which the singular and undifferentiated reality of substance is spectrally differentiated and structured in the way that we human beings then perceive it to be. Drawing the line where they do, the subjectivists would understand everything other than substance itself to consist of mere appearances - or shadows, in Plato's famous metaphor - since the modifications of substance, which are only ever perceivable under some attribute or other, would themselves have to be understood as subjectively structured by the attributes and so as belonging to the same realm of appearance. Perhaps the most famous spokesperson for this interpretation is Hegel who, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* argues that, for Spinoza, 'only this absolute unity is reality', and hence that the attributes can be no more than what '[t]he understanding grasps... as the reality of substance', that is, 'only reality in the view of the understanding, which falls outside substance'.[1] This earns Spinoza the dubious distinction of having formulated a philosophy of 'Acosmism':

[1] Hegel, *History of Philosophy*, vol. III, pp. 256, 260.

> [I]f Spinoza is called an atheist for the sole reason that he does not distinguish God from the world, it is a misuse of the term. Spinozism might really just as well or even better have been termed Acosmism, since according to its teaching it is not to the world, finite existence, the universe, that reality and permanence are to be ascribed, but rather to God alone as the substantial. Spinoza maintains that there is no such thing as what is known as the world, it is merely a form of God, and in and for itself it is nothing. The world has no true reality, and all this that we know as the world has been cast into the abyss of the one identity.[2]

Others have located the separation between reality and appearance in Spinoza's system in the distinction between substance and its modifications. For if substance is indeed unique, unchanging, infinite and eternal, then what confronts us in everyday experience as an expansive world of variety and change must in some way be an illusion of our own making, since we are not experiencing the world as it really is. Clearly with this kind of interpretation in mind, Leibniz ventures a thinly veiled reference to Spinoza:

> [I]t would follow that no created substance, no identical soul, would be permanent… but everything would reduce to certain evanescent and flowing modifications or phantasms, so to speak, of the one permanent divine substance. And, what reduces to the same thing, God would be the nature and substance of all things - a doctrine of most evil repute, which a writer who was subtle indeed but irreligious, in recent years imposed upon the world.[3]

While Leibniz may have only exaggerated this caricature to bring his own alternative into sharper relief, his likening of modifications to 'phantasms' with an 'evanescent' airiness nonetheless expresses well this particular way of drawing the line between the real and the merely apparent in Spinoza's philosophy. Another way of denying the modifications a status of genuine reality, is to find something arbitrary, or at least conventional, in the way they are individuated by a finite intellect. Bennett, for example, has suggested that we think of Spinoza's substance/mode relationship as a 'field metaphysic', such that individual modes are adjectival upon regions of substance (as expressed under some attribute).[4] If this is the case, then there may be something metaphysically arbitrary in the way that different regions are cordoned off

---

[2] Ibid. p. 281.

[3] Leibniz, 'On Nature Itself, or on the Inherent Force and Actions of Created Things', in Loemker ed., *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, p. 502. For a discussion of the influence that this reaction had on the formation of Leibniz's own views on the activity inherent in all '*supposita*', see Maria Rosa Antognazza, *Leibniz: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 422 and *passim*.

[4] Bennett, *Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 95 and *passim*.

and identified as modes, a kind of Quinean indeterminacy *avant la lettre*.[5] For if the individuation of modes depends on a subject's (or at least a group of subjects') way of carving up what is in itself a single and continuous reality, then modes would to that extent seem to enjoy only a somewhat qualified and subjective status.

Another way of drawing the line that seems natural looks, not to the distinction between substance and attributes, or to that between substance and modes, but to an apparent discrepancy *among* the attributes. For there seems to be, in certain important respects, a dominance of the attribute of thought over the other attributes. The impression that there is a dependence of this kind on the attribute of thought was especially vivid amidst the wave of Spinoza scholarship that appeared in England towards the close of the eighteenth century. Pollock, Martineau and Caird seem to converge on this fundamental verdict.[6] Coincidental though this burst of interest in Spinoza may have seemed, these scholars were apparently united in their debt to their idealist forerunners in Germany, and especially Hegel. But unlike their famous predecessor, who regarded Spinoza's attributes as '*only* reality in the view of the understanding, which falls outside substance', these English scholars took the attribute of thought to be a genuine reality, but the *only* reality in Spinoza's system, under which the other attributes can have no more than a derivative status. Despite granting Spinoza's intentions to the contrary, Pollock concluded that 'all Attributes but thought are really superfluous, and Spinoza's doctrine, when thus reduced to its simplest terms, is that nothing exists but thought and its modifications'.[7] Similarly, Martineau inferred that, because only '"through" Thought alone can anything be "conceived"... there remains only the Thinking principle'.[8] Caird, in turn, echoed these assessments, finding in Spinoza's system 'an unconscious preponderance ascribed to the ideal side'.[9] These 'idealist readings' have therefore taken Spinoza to equate the real with the attribute of thought, with other attributes having no more than an 'appearance' of independent reality themselves. In the case of us human

[5] W. V. Quine, *Word & Object* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960) ch. 2, p. 23 and *passim*.

[6] In virtue of this affinity, there is reason to regard this wave of scholarship as forming a distinctive school of 'British Idealist' Spinoza scholars, which would also include Joachim, writing in the early twentieth century. For an interesting attempt to sketch out this kind of historiography, see Samuel Newlands, 'More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza', *Philosophy Compass*, 6, no. 2 (2011), pp. 109-19. See, also, his companion piece, 'Hegel's Idealist Reading of Spinoza', *Philosophy Compass*, 6, no. 2 (2011), pp. 100-8.

[7] Pollock, *Spinoza*, p. 184.

[8] Martineau, *Study of Spinoza*, p. 188.

[9] Caird, *Spinoza*, p. 202.

beings, this means that the attribute of extension belongs, in some sense, to the realm of appearance.

But the fault line between the real and the apparent in Spinoza's system might be charted wherever there seems to be a fundamental dichotomy of some kind. So far, interpretations have been considered that locate the decisive break between substance and attributes, between substance (as expressed through its attributes) and modes, and between the attribute of thought and other attributes. But it might just as well be ascribed to the distinction between the infinite and the finite, between eternity and duration, between the immutable and the changeable, or even, within the modal realm, between the infinite and the finite modes. But, rather than competing with each other, these various ways of drawing the distinction can be seen to seep into, or at least dovetail with, one another. Thus Hegel's flamboyant characterisation of Spinoza's 'Acosmism' overlaps to some extent with Leibniz's more polemical description of an 'evanescent' or 'phantasmic' framework, while both of these share some affinity with the 'British Idealist' readings. Again, if the distinction between, say, eternity and duration is thought to mark the separation, then it might seem to do so in tandem with the distinction between the infinite and finite modes, since the former are said to be eternal, whereas the latter appear to belong to the realm of temporality and change.

However, in addition to these alternative ways of demarcating the real in Spinoza's thought, there remains the epistemological question of how this ontological realm relates to cognition. Indeed, any distinction between reality and appearance must be, in at least one respect, an epistemological distinction, since it concerns either the apprehension of what is really the case, on the one hand, or the rather more subjective condition of merely having things appear to one to be a certain way. Thus a somewhat different angle from which to approach the distinction between the real and the apparent in Spinoza's thought from those canvassed so far, would be to consider the matter epistemologically. For many it has seemed self-evident that Spinoza identified the realm of appearance with the delivery of the inferior modes of cognition, such as sensory perception, and reserved the status of 'the real' for what can be known in a purely intellectual way, purged of any sensual impurities. This relegation of the sensory might seem to be a straightforward feature of Spinoza's 'rationalism', epitomised in the claim that 'we perceive... singular things... through the senses in a way that is mutilated, confused, and without order

for the intellect [*mutilate, confuse et sine ordine ad intellectum*]'.[10] However, rather than being an alternative place to draw the line between appearance and reality within Spinoza's system, this epistemological characterisation simply offers an additional specification in terms of the way in which these two contrasting categories relate to cognition. So for each of the above ways of drawing a line between appearance and reality metaphysically, there will be a further question as to how the distinction relates to cognition, which then becomes an epistemological matter. But it is true that many have sought to emphasise the opposition between the sensory and the intellectual in Spinoza's thought, and have taken this to be at the root of the distinction between appearance and reality.

An ontology of immanence

However, none of the alternatives canvassed so far seem to fit the true shape of Spinoza's philosophy. In fact, the illusion of choice among them stems from a shared misunderstanding, of which they are equally culpable. They all stem from an oversight regarding what was perhaps the most revolutionary feature of Spinoza's thought. For what he always sought to overturn was precisely the kind of transcendentalism involved in any sharp opposition between the ontological and the epistemological. This is indeed a genuine distinction in his system, but it is not to be conceived of in the way that these interpretations suggest. There cannot be any detachment, or 'gap', between the two. As discussed in Chapter 4, Peter's 'essence' consists *both* in what he is 'formally', i.e. what he is 'really', *and* what he is 'objectively', i.e. what he is 'really known to be'. It is a basic feature of Spinoza's position that existence and intelligibility are two sides of one coin, without any 'gap' between the ontological and the epistemological. In Chapter 4, this was seen to depend on Spinoza's innovative appropriation of the scholastic notion of the 'objective [*objective*]' with respect to ideas, which he allows a public and open presence, as opposed to the more private and 'representational' conception developed by Descartes. For Spinoza, the operative axis is instead one that extends from a more or less partial to a more or less complete grasp of that which is

[10] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p40s2.

immediately present, which in turn responds to the extent to which one is active or passive in one's thoughts.

Similarly, the category of 'substance' cannot refer to a realm 'beyond' its 'attributes' or its 'modifications', but must be understood as expressed *in* and *through* these other categories. In place of any sharp separation between creator and creation, itself a theologised appropriation of a generally Platonic tendency towards ontological hierarchy, Spinoza effectively 'democratised' being by demonstrating the parity among existent things. In drawing the consequence that 'God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things', from the pantheistic result that 'Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God', Spinoza valorised all existence by situating it on the same plane.[11] In doing so, he traded, to continue the spatial metaphor, the 'vertical' metaphysics of the old theology for his own 'horizontal' alternative. It therefore cannot be correct that, on Spinoza's scheme, modes are no more than faint or shadowy reflections of a true reality lying 'beyond' in the realm of substance, because modes simply are the *expression* or *manifestation* of that reality. Indeed this is the principal reason for his apt articulation of the relationship between substance and its manifestations as one of 'expression', the far-ranging developments of which have been explored, for example, by Deleuze.[12]

Of course, it is true that Spinoza, in line with the philosophical tradition before him, conceived of modes as dependent on substance, that is, on that of which they are the affections, or that through which they are conceived. This much is explicit in the definitions of these terms, and a principle which enjoys the distinction of being the first to be demonstrated in the Ethics:[13] 'A substance is prior in nature to its affections.'[14] But the kind of priority involved is not that of the dependence of a created thing on its creator, nor even, say, that of an image or reflection on its source. It is rather a kind of logical dependence of things, in the most general sense of the word 'thing', on the notion of existence itself, a fundamental dependence of the variety and multiplicity of 'things' on a shared basic participation in 'being a thing':

[11] Spinoza, 1p18, 1p15.

[12] Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1968).

[13] Spinoza, 1def3, 1def5.

[14] Ibid. 1p1.

> For we are accustomed to refer all individuals in Nature to one genus, which is called the most general, i.e., to the notion of being, which pertains absolutely to all individuals in Nature.[15]

This kind of 'dependence' is so radically different from that which obtains in a more transcendental metaphysics that in comparison it does not seem to be 'dependence' at all. Indeed, to say that things 'depend' on a shared substance, simply in order to say that they exist, is to deny that they rely on any more ultimate metaphysical order. What enables Spinoza to perform this great inversion of traditional metaphysics is his replacement of a transcendent originating power with the ever-unfolding power immanently contained in nature itself. This ontological inversion requires a certain re-construal of the relationship between 'substance' and 'modes'. While it remains true that the former is more fundamental than the latter, it is also true that the former is what it is in virtue of its expression in the latter. The expression of substance in a manifold of singular things is the manifestation of substance itself. What for dualistically inclined thinkers in the early modern period was a problematic gulf between the observed world of finite things and the unobservable ontology underlying it disappears, leaving complete identity between individual things and their shared participation in existence itself.

Alexandre Matheron has ranked the reality of distinct individual things as one of Spinoza's two most fundamental principles (the other affirming a universal intelligibility):

> [There are] two fundamental principles. The first remains implicit: there are *things*, *individual* things; individuality, far from being an illusion due to our ignorance of the Whole, possesses an irreducible reality. The second, under one form or another, is the *leit-motiv* of the *Ethics*: everything is intelligible, through-and-through and without any residue.[16]

This is indeed the only sense to be made of the attention that Spinoza lavishes on the theory of individual essences and our grasp of them in the form of definitions:

> Therefore, so long as we are dealing with the Investigation of things, we must never infer anything from abstractions [*ex abstractis*], and we shall take very great care not to mix up the things that are only in the intellect with those that are real. But the best conclusion will have to be drawn from some particular affirmative essence, *or*, from a true and legitimate definition. For from universal axioms alone the intellect cannot descend to singulars, since axioms

[15] Ibid. 4pref.

[16] Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969), pp. 9-10, translation my own.

> extend to infinity, and do not determine the intellect to the contemplation of one singular thing rather than another.[17]

I will return to Spinoza's use of the term 'abstraction [*abstractus*]' as a contrastive for that which is real. For now, the important thing to note is that individual things, understood metaphysically as 'modifications' of substance, are genuinely real, and that their nature *qua* distinct individual entities is encapsulated in each of their respective essences.

That there is no 'gap' between substance and its expression is even more salient in the case of attributes than it is in the case of modes, a fact that is again already evident from the opening set of definitions in the *Ethics*, in which God is defined as having 'an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses [*exprimit*] an eternal and infinite essence'.[18] As discussed in Chapter 3, both the 'subjectivist' and 'objectivist' sides of the debate concerning the attributes have made the mistake of postulating a 'gap' of some kind between substance and its attributes. The fallacy involved in this way of thinking about the attributes was discussed in Chapter 3, and passages were cited to support a more charitable reading according to which attributes are akin to alternative fields of meaning through which reality is, not only apprehended, but indeed objectively constituted, and immediately present to any suitably inculcated intellect. Just as the absence of any threat to objectivity was highlighted by emphasising the role of attributes in 'constituting the essence' of substance, so too it is important to emphasise in this case the great significance in characterising the relationship between substance and its attributes as one of 'expression [*exprimere*]', a relationship which consists in an immediate and 'immanent [*immanens*]' presence.[19] So neither the distinction between substance and its modifications, nor that between substance and its attributes, can be read as generating a division between the real and the merely apparent. Neither Hegel's subjectivist gloss on the attributes, nor Leibniz's deflationary characterisation of the modes, can be defensible, because both disregard the important metaphysical work being done by this fundamental principle of immanence.

Nor is the kind of idealist interpretation, which, naturally enough, seemed necessary to the 'British Idealists', able to accommodate the shape of Spinoza's ontology. Although these scholars were at least careful to acknowledge that the

[17] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §93.

[18] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1def6.

[19] Ibid. 1def4.

formulation of an idealist philosophy is something at odds with Spinoza's own official intentions, they all concluded that this was nonetheless the inescapable tendency of his philosophy, regardless of what he intended. But if a reading can be found that reconciles the meaning of the philosophical content with the intentions of its author, then that is surely to be preferred. With this exegetical aim in mind, it might reasonably be argued that, not only was this philosophical orientation accidental to Spinoza's own aspirations, but it cannot hope to capture the sense of his writings either. For, as discussed in Chapter 4, the impression that there is a kind of asymmetry among the attributes can arise only when they are compared with, or measured against, one another. Not only does this violate the fundamental heterogeneity and incommensurability of the attributes, established early on in the *Ethics* at (1p10), but it ignores the essential metaphysical direction implied by the relationship of 'expression' that holds between substance and its attributes. For each of the attributes is, in perfect parity with all the others, and each in its own distinctive and conceptually self-contained way, an expression of one and the same reality. From this - more fundamental - perspective of the 'direction of expression' it becomes clear that attributes are all on an equal ontological footing. In addition to this, and owing to the role of the attributes in expressing the *same* reality, there is also a structural isomorphism that obtains across all of them, i.e., the 'parallelism' discussed in Chapter 4.[20] This structural isomorphism, however, does not permit a translation-manual from the 'language' of one attribute to another. It involves no more than the rather minimal claim that, for each mode *a* under Attribute A, there is a mode *b* under Attribute B, and in a sense independent of any attribute in particular, *a* is identical to *b*.

This insistence on the symmetry among the attributes may seem mistaken, in light of a further feature of the attribute of thought, already noted in Chapter 4. What Bennett has called the 'lopsidedness' of the attribute of thought was in fact brought to Spinoza's attention by Walter von Tschirnhaus. At first indirectly, through the mediation of their mutual acquaintance, Georg Schuller, and then directly in his own hand, he challenged Spinoza's view that we as human beings are 'tuned in' to the attributes of thought and extension alone. If attributes are, as Spinoza maintains, all jointly the expression of God's essence, then why is it that we do not know, say, the affections of our own body insofar as they are expressed as modes under attributes

[20] Ibid. 2p7.

other than thought and extension? And, if our own particular way of life is entirely contained within these two attributes, then does it not follow that there are as many other ways of life, and, indeed, as many other worlds, as there are other attributes and modes expressed under them?

> [D]oes it not follow from this that creatures constituted by other attributes cannot on their side have any idea of extension? If so, it would seem that there must be constituted as many worlds as there are attributes of God. For example, our world of extension, to call it so, it of a certain size; there would exist worlds of that same size constituted by different attributes. And just as we perceive, apart from thought, only extension, so the creatures of those worlds must perceive nothing but their own world's attribute, and thought.[21]

Spinoza's response was more or less a rehearsal of the train of thought followed in the *Ethics*:

> [T]he essence of mind consists (Prop.13, II) solely in its being the idea of an actually existing body…. Now this idea of the body involves and expresses no other attributes of God than extension and thought. It is thus clear that the human mind - i.e., the idea of the human body - involves and expresses no other attributes of God except these two… So I conclude that the human mind can attain knowledge of no other attribute of God than these two, which was the point at issue.[22]

But this did not satisfy Tschirnhaus, who continued to press him on the matter:

> Will you please let me have a proof of your assertion that the soul cannot perceive any more attributes of God than extension and thought…
>
> Although I do indeed gather from your text that the world is one, it is also no less clear… that therefore each single thing is expressed in infinite modes. Hence it seems to follow that, although the particular modification which constitutes my mind and the particular modification which expresses my body are one and the same modification, this is expressed in infinite modes… Hence there now arises the question… [Why] does the mind perceive only the particular modification expressed through extension, that is, the human body, and not any other expression through other attributes?[23]

Spinoza's response seems only to embrace the problematic result that modes of thought vastly outnumber those under any other attribute:

---

[21] Letter 63; Spinoza, *The Letters*, pp. 295-6.

[22] Letter 64; Ibid. pp. 298-9.

[23] Letter 65; Ibid. p. 301.

> [I]n reply to your objection, I say that although each thing is expressed in infinite modes in the infinite intellect of God, the infinite ideas in which it is expressed cannot constitute one and the same mind of a particular thing, but an infinity of minds. For each of these infinite ideas has no connection with the others, as I have explained in that same Scholium to Proposition 7, Part II of the *Ethics*, and as is evident from Prop. 10, Part I. If you will give a little attention to these, you will see that no difficulty remains, etc.[24]

Indeed the situation may not be as problematic as it seems. One way of diffusing the difficulty is to introduce a notion of cardinality with respect to the attributes. It seems that all Spinoza requires in order to preserve an isomorphism across the attributes is that they share the same cardinality, which seems undermined by Tschirnhaus' challenge. However, following more recent developments in set theory, and, in particular, Georg Cantor's work on transfinite sets, which in a sense are all 'infinite', though to varying degrees of cardinality, some sense can be made of Spinoza's insistence on an 'infinity of minds' for each mode under another attribute:

> Tschirnhaus' claim that, in allowing both ideas of things (bodies) and ideas of ideas, Spinoza had violated the parallelism by making thought more extensive than extension, has been echoed by many commentators to the present day. Seen in the light of modern set theory, the postulated violation does not exist. Two infinite sets may have the same cardinality (which is what 2p7 asserts for thought and extension) while one of them has also a one-to-one mapping between two of its proper subsets.[25]

Of course, Spinoza did not have recourse to such notions, but perhaps he understood in an intuitive way that his position was consistent, and that perhaps some theoretical account was possible, if not yet conceivable.

Finally, the kind of interpretation that attributes to Spinoza a sharp opposition between the sensory and the intellectual must be treated with caution, since it too can distort the actual distinction that Spinoza sets up. Far from opposing these two categories in any rigid way, Spinoza regarded the ideas furnished by the imagination (*imaginatio*), which includes sensory perception, not as erroneous *per se*, but as prone to 'wandering [*vaga*]' until enfolded by the higher forms of cognition in a holistic collaboration between 'lower' and 'higher' forms.[26] This is why, even when we come to learn the true distance of the sun from the earth, we do not cease to perceive it *as though* it were 200 feet away, in doing which there is no error:

---

[24] Letter 66; Ibid. p. 302.

[25] Spinoza, *The Letters*, p. 326, note 351.

[26] See Chapter 5.

> [W]hen we look at the sun, we imagine it to be about 200 feet away from us. In this we are deceived so long as we are ignorant of its true distance; but when its distance is known, the error is removed, not the imagination, i.e. the idea of the sun, which explains its nature only so far as the Body is affected by it… And so it is with the other imaginations by which the Mind is deceived…: they are not contrary to the true, and do not disappear on its presence.[27]

'Superficial' vs. 'authentic'

If, as the results of this brief survey suggest, Spinoza did not conceive of the distinction between reality and appearance in any of these ways, that need not be taken to imply that he rejected the distinction *tout court*. Like other traditional notions and distinctions that he inherited, this particular distinction is reconfigured in a novel way. To appreciate the way in which Spinoza reinterpreted this classic distinction, and to bring the discussion back into line with the main thread, it will be instructive to consult his alignment of the distinction with that between eternity and duration. In the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza distinguishes between the intellect, which 'perceives things not so much under duration as under a certain species of eternity, and in an infinite number', and the imagination, which, 'when it imagines things, perceives them under a certain number, determinate duration and quantity'.[28] It is interesting to compare this with a similar distinction made in the 'letter on the infinite':

> [W]e conceive quantity in two ways: either abstractly, or [*sive*] superficially [*superficialiter*], as we have it in the imagination with the help of the senses; or as Substance, apprehended solely by means of the intellect.[29]

In Latin, the word '*sive*' is a disjunctive of inclusion, often connoting equivalence between two disjuncts, in this case, between 'abstract' and 'superficial' ways of conceiving things. It seems that Spinoza regards an 'abstraction', or subsumption of a number of individuals under a general axiom or rule, to be 'superficial' because, in collecting individuals together in this way, one must gloss over the various aspects that differentiate them, which is to ignore a certain level of reality, i.e. the determinate essence or nature of those individuals. But the resulting conception is

---

[27] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p1s.

[28] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §108.

[29] Letter 12; Spinoza, *The Letters*, p. 103.

not false of any of these individuals. It is simply partial or truncated, indeed, a grasp of the 'surface [*superficies*]' of the things in question. This is how things are conceived when one abstracts from their particular nature, and views them as conditioned by their surrounding circumstances in space and time. In other words, it is a kind of cognition *sub specie durationis*. In order to penetrate beyond this surface and grasp a thing's nature more fully, attention must be given to each thing in turn, so that its 'inmost essence' can be understood. This 'inmost essence', timelessly contained in the attributes of God or Nature, is conceived *sub specie æternitatis*:

> The essences of singular, changeable things are not to be drawn from their series, *or* order of existing, since it offers us nothing but extrinsic denominations, relations, or at most, circumstances, all of which are far from the inmost essence of things. That essence is to be sought only from the fixed and eternal things, and at the same time from the laws inscribed in these things, as in their true codes, according to which all singular things come to be, and are ordered.[30]

So the categories that frame a superficial conception of things under a species of duration include 'extrinsic denominations', 'relations', and 'circumstances'. It seems that singular things cannot be known any more than superficially when they are conceived *only* in terms of 'relations', whether those relations furnish incidental or adventitious 'circumstances' for the things or whether they involve a causal influence of some kind.

This suggests that there is more to the modal realm than simply an infinite series of transitive causal determination. It is, of course, part of the story:

> Every singular thing, *or* any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce and effect by another cause… and again, this cause… and so on, to infinity.[31]

But, although being embedded in the 'common order of nature [*ordo naturæ communis*]' and thus subject to the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' is a *necessary* condition for the existence of finite things, it is not the most fundamental source of their activity.[32] This source of activity must, in the first place, issue from the nature of the things themselves, that is, from their 'inmost essence'. This is a

---

[30] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §101.

[31] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p28.

[32] 'From this it follows that man is necessarily always subject to passions, that he follows and obeys the common order of Nature, and accommodates himself to it as much as the nature of things requires.' Ibid. 4p4c.

commitment to which Spinoza remains faithful throughout his career, and one that looms as large as ever in the *Ethics*, in which God is proven to be the cause 'not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence', and in which an individual thing's essence, as defined at (2def2), and equated with the thing's *conatus* at (3p7), comes to play a pivotal role in the overall structure of the philosophical system.[33]

It is this distinction between things conceived superficially and things conceived according to their inmost essence, together with a corresponding manner of existence, that informs Spinoza's reconfiguration of the classic opposition between appearance and reality. Leaving one's cognition at the level of *imaginatio*, without an active use of *ratio* and *scientia*, confines one to a superficial perspective, responsive only to the surface of things. At the same time, one's whole manner of existence is correspondingly superficial, swayed by the effects on one's mind from outside oneself, that is, by the passions (which Spinoza calls a kind of 'negation'), framed in terms of one's surrounding circumstances, and troubled by the most fearful negation of all, death. Conversely, when *imaginatio* is enfolded within an active use of *ratio*, and complemented by the insight of *scientia intuitiva*, then one's perspective is deepened to include more than just the surface of things. One grasps the inner essence of things, which is an expression of Nature's unfolding power, and one understands this as a manifestation of the immanent source of change and variety. In this case, too, one's cognitive enhancement is expressed in a whole manner of existence, no longer superficial, but authentic, determined from within, and oriented towards life, not death, as the true animating principle in nature. These alternatives do not refer to distinct ontological realms, or to a distinction between a 'world of reality' and a 'world of appearance'. They relate to the same world, but involve qualitatively distinct ways of grasping and living in it. This is Spinoza's immanentist version of the classic distinction.

The sense in which a passion is a kind of 'negation' can be appreciated in the light of the distinction made between an action and a passion in *Ethics* III, itself a double-edged conception that Spinoza seems to have inherited from Descartes. The latter, following a customary gibe at the 'ancients', whose faults 'are nowhere more apparent than in their writings on the passions', begins his study of the *Passions of the Soul* with the foundational principle 'that whatever takes place or occurs is generally called by philosophers a "passion" with regard to the subject to which it happens

[33] Ibid. 1p25.

and an "action" with regard to that which makes it happen'.[34] This foundation is echoed in Spinoza's definitions in *Ethics* III:

> D2: I say that we act when something happens, in us or outside us, of which we are the adequate cause, i.e. (by d1), when something in us or outside us follows from our nature... On the other hand, I say that we are acted on when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause.
>
> D3: …*Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I understand by the affect an action; otherwise, a passion*.[35]

When an interaction is conceived from the point of view of the thing affected, it can be said to involve a 'negation', as Spinoza says when focussing specifically on the case of the mind:

> We see, then, that the passions are not related to the Mind except insofar as it has something which involves a negation, *or* insofar as it is considered as a part of nature which cannot be perceived clearly and distinctly through itself.[36]

Although, from the point of view of the affected mind, a passion is superficially conceived as a positive reality, it is in fact a 'negation'. Understood as it is in itself, it is not a passion at all, but a fraction of a complete, adequate cause. Conversely, an action issues from the inmost essence of an agent, who is its adequate cause, so an action is, understood as it is in itself, a positive reality. Spinoza's appropriation of the distinction between appearance and reality therefore hinges on this distinction between the passive and the active. However, instead of referring to two distinct ontological realms, these terms refer to two different perspectives on, and ways of living among, the same set of things and events. This is perhaps unsurprising, given what has been said about the alternative species of duration and eternity. That is, these species are alternative ways in which existence is either expressed or conceived. The former perspective conceives things according to a random series of encounters with neighbouring objects, whereas the latter perspective conceives things as determining their existence in virtue of their essential nature:

---

[34] René Descartes, *Les passions de l'âme*, §1, AT XI.327-8. Translation is from CSM, vol. I, p. 328.

[35] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3def2, 3def3.

[36] Ibid. 3p3s.

> We conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature. But the things we conceive in this second way as true, or *real*, we conceive under a species of eternity, and to the extent they involve the eternal and infinite essence of God.[37]

Since human beings are, like all finite things, necessarily embedded in the 'common order of nature [*ordo naturæ communis*]', and are in constant interaction with other things, the question of how much, or in what way, one is responsible for one's actions and for the expression of one's nature is necessarily one of degree. So while all finite modes are in continuous interaction with fellow finite modes (as described at (1p28)), there will nevertheless be various different *respects in which*, and *extents to which*, given their surrounding circumstances and influences, finite modes determine their own existential condition.

It is for this reason that Spinoza, like Descartes before him, alludes to a sliding scale of reality. The more a particular thing acts or exists in accordance with its own nature, the more reality it has. As Spinoza puts it in the somewhat different context of a proof for the existence of God, 'since being able to exist is power, it follows that the more reality belongs to the nature of a thing, the more powers it has, *of itself*, to exist'.[38] Unavoidably subject to surrounding influences, we are vulnerable to the passions that these outside encounters occasion in us and at the same time we undergo a corresponding change in our overall existential condition:

> An Affect that is called a Passion of the mind is a confused idea, by which the Mind affirms of its Body, or of some part of it, a greater or lesser force of existing than before...
>
> [W]hen I say *a greater or lesser force of existing than before*, I do not understand that the Mind compares the Body's present constitution with a past constitution, but that the idea which constitutes the form of the affect affirms of the body something which really involves more or less of reality than before.[39]

But what can it mean to say that something has more or less reality than something else, or that something increases or decreases its share of reality? Just as a passion has no positive reality in itself, or is what Spinoza calls a 'negation', so too there can be no genuine absence of reality, or any lack of perfection, *except* insofar as this is conceptualised from a superficial perspective, perhaps through making a

[37] Ibid. 5p29s, emphasis added.

[38] Ibid. 1p11s, emphasis added.

[39] Ibid. Part III, 'General Definition of the Affects'.

comparison between a thing and another thing which is thought to be a more real - or more perfect - instance of a general type. 'Perfection and imperfection, therefore, are only modes of thinking, i.e., notions we are accustomed to feign because we compare individuals of the same species or genus to one another.'[40] Although this anthropocentric and superficial approach to valuation is identified as being only a mode of thinking, Spinoza does grant a genuine metaphysical meaning to the term 'perfection', albeit by collapsing it into that of 'reality': 'By reality and perfection I understand the same thing.'[41] Spinoza grants that, in a sense, all individuals belong to 'one genus', that is, 'to the notion of being'.[42] However, compared to one another, some can be seen to more actively express their nature than others. Again, one is reminded of the 'great chain of being' that Spinoza describes in the 'physical digression', the lower levels of which having less power than the higher.[43] However, this does not mean that there is a lack or absence of reality in any of these things:

> [I]nsofar as we attribute something to them that involves negation, like a limit, an end, lack of power, etc., we call them imperfect, because they do not affect our Mind as much as those we call perfect, and not because something is lacking in them which is theirs, or because Nature has sinned.[44]

It is no accident that this kind of anthropocentric valuation belongs to what Spinoza calls a superficial conception of things, one that does not attend to their inmost essence. Confined to the accidental associations of the imagination, which reflect only the extrinsic relations among things, Spinoza's analogue for the classic philosophical category of appearance includes a conceptualisation of things as passive, or as lacking power, since these are 'negations' which do not pertain to the essences of the affected things themselves.[45] But this conceptualisation is not false. It is simply partial, reflecting more the viewpoint from which it is formed than that which it represents. Spinoza does not for a moment suggest that we purge our thought of these 'modes of thinking' nor cleanse our language of the terms with which we express them, for they are essential to the practical aims of the *Ethics*. That is, one needs the appropriate conceptual resources for addressing one's passions before one can master them, and one needs to aspire to what Spinoza calls a 'model

[40] Ibid. 4pref.

[41] Ibid. 2def6.

[42] Ibid. 4pref.

[43] Ibid. 2l7s.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid. 3p3.

of human nature' in order to achieve the kind of ethical and spiritual emancipation sought through the philosophy of the *Ethics*.[46]

Spinoza's treatment of the superficial is therefore not eliminative. He was not suggesting, *per impossibile*, that this mode of conception and manner of living be phased out of human life altogether. His point seems rather to be that, although this is a necessary aspect of the human condition, it can be rendered healthier when complimented by an intellectual grasp of the inner essence of things. Although superficial at a metaphysical level, thinking in terms of the imperfection of things or in terms of a comparison with an 'ideal model' can nonetheless serve an important heuristic purpose, and to this extent the 'lower' form of conception can be brought into harmony with the 'higher' forms. Just as the imagination is not necessarily erroneous *per se*, but depends on a collaborative relationship with the intellect, so, too, a superficial conception of things is not pernicious *per se*, but stands to be complimented by a deeper insight into the inmost essence of things.[47] As discussed above, the former conception is framed under a species of duration, whereas the latter is framed under a species of eternity. So, given the necessary interplay between the two conceptions, it can be concluded that eternity is not a kind of existence apart from, or 'outside', duration, as it might be portrayed under a transcendental framework; rather, eternity is an existential comportment *with respect to* things understood *sub specie durationis*. It is *at* a certain time and place, or *for* a certain length of time, and from one place to another, that the manner of existence which Spinoza calls 'eternal' is expressed. That manner of existence, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, consists in an expression of the essence of the thing in question, that is, insofar as the thing is free.

Thus the 'real', or rather, the 'authentic', for Spinoza, consists in the positive expression of a thing's essence. The only thing whose existence is exclusively conditioned by its own essence is God or Nature considered as a whole, and therefore God or Nature is the only being that is absolutely real or authentic. Modifications of God or Nature can only partially condition their own existence in accordance with their essence, and so their authenticity can be only a matter of degree. From the point of view of God or Nature, however, this 'degree of reality' is not conceived as limited or negated, but is understood as contributing its positive

[46] Ibid. 4pref.

[47] Ibid. 2p35s.

expression to the whole of which it is an integrated modification. It is only from a limited and superficial point of view that this may appear to be less than real. In fact, there is no lack of reality in nature whatsoever. All those aspects of life that involve an imperfection or a negation, such as those episodes of human life given over to intemperate passion, are the aspects that Spinoza regards as superficial. Taken together, these superficial aspects are like our own shadow from which we struggle to free ourselves. In those moments when things are grasped according to their inmost essence, these superficial aspects are understood according to their true causes and origins, which *ex hypothesi* do not involve (except 'partially') the essence or nature of the individual in question. Forming a conception of things *sub specie æternitatis*, these aspects in a sense evaporate as unreal appearances, at least with respect to the individual in question, and from that eternal perspective, all that 'remains' are those aspects in which an individual has expressed his or her essence, determined him-or-herself, and has been truly free. It therefore transpires that authenticity, for Spinoza, coincides with freedom. In the following chapter, this result will provide the basis for one possible way of reconciling the 'this-life' character of the eternity of the mind, with the rather more 'next-life' sounding remarks concerning something which 'remains' after the death of the body.

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.

Emily Dickinson

Chapter 8

Freedom from Death

This dissertation began with an invitation to uncover the meaning of Spinoza's notion of the 'eternity of the mind', as expounded in the last pages of the *Ethics*. This ambition prompted an investigation into certain key concepts in his philosophy, such as 'eternity [*æternitas*]', 'mind [*mens*]', and 'cognition [*cognitio*]'. This in turn gradually brought to light the immanent, 'this-life', shape of his mature eschatology. Following these twists and turns, the quest has now led to this, the concluding chapter, where the final pieces of the puzzle can be put into place. In Chapter 2, I suggested that, although Spinoza may have set aside the language of 'immortality' when he came to write the *Ethics*, his attempt in that later work to substantiate a genuine form of life without death might nonetheless be said to consummate a lifelong project of trying to rethink this religious concept in a way that fits with his radically immanent view of the world. The activation of an eternal, 'deathless', way of life, was seen, in Chapter 5, to come about essentially through an exercise of that most human of qualities, the 'life of the mind', though it was pointed out that this by no means consists in a world-shy flight from the hustle and bustle of life, but rather in the cognitive dimension of a whole manner of existence that encompasses all the aspects that together constitute ethical fulfilment.

As discussed in Chapter 6, what unifies these various aspects into a single ethical conception, for Spinoza, is the diversity of ways in which they jointly form a unified condition of active self-determination, or freedom. It is one particular expression of this overall freedom that has been the subject matter of this dissertation. For it is a certain 'freedom from death' that lies at the heart of Spinoza's mature eschatology in the guise of the 'eternity of the mind'. At the close of Chapter 6, I indicated that

this 'freedom from death' could not simply be reduced to the more general condition of 'psychological freedom', as it might seem to do for a generally Epicurean strategy, aimed at alleviating the fear of death. While this is indeed one facet of Spinoza's philosophical eschatology, it could not be the whole story. In this concluding chapter, I hope to elaborate the sense in which there is, crucially, in addition to this 'psychological point', also a 'metaphysical point' to the doctrine. It is in virtue of the 'metaphysical point' of his doctrine that substantive sense has to be made of his attempt to corroborate the claim that 'something' of the mind 'remains' after the death of the body, even if a final evaluation of his success here must remain somewhat nuanced, and even uncertain. Following this elaboration, I will conclude the dissertation as a whole with a general appraisal of Spinoza's treatment of this theological question, finding the importance of his contribution to consist in a genuine and defensible philosophy of life-affirmation.

The importance of freedom in Spinoza's philosophical eschatology

The most immediate significance that the notion of freedom has for Spinoza's eschatology lies in the role that it plays in substantiating the quality of life that he presents as being without death. This is as true of his early account in the *Short Treatise* as it is of his mature position in the *Ethics*. While the early work concludes with a chapter titled 'Of True Freedom', in which Spinoza maintains, '[t]he true intellect can never come to perish', the final remark of the later work records its author's confidence that he has 'completed all [he] wished to set forth touching the mind's power over the emotions and *the mind's freedom*', such that it should be clear that 'the wise man, insofar as he is considered as such, is hardly troubled in spirit, but being, by a certain eternal necessity, conscious of himself, and of God, and of things, he never ceases to be, but always possesses true peace of mind [*vera animi acquiescentia*]'.[1] However, although both early and later treatments of this question are framed within a wider ethic of human freedom, there is also, as has been charted in this dissertation, an important sense in which the earlier view evolved into a more refined position in the *Ethics*. Whereas the earlier offering remains somewhat

[1] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, II, p. 148; Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p42s, emphasis added.

entangled in a kind of mind-body dualism, and thus a correspondingly transcendental, 'next-life' eschatology, the final and polished doctrine presented in the *Ethics* conveys an entirely 'realised', 'this-life' alternative. Not coincidentally, this fits Spinoza's eventually decisive endorsement of a 'qualitative' conception of eternity, as discussed in Chapter 2.

In light of this, the eternity of the mind put forward in the *Ethics* has to be taken to be about a *quality* of existence, rather than a *quantity* or 'amount' of existence. The quality of existence referred to as 'eternal' has been gradually characterised over the preceding chapters along parallel yet equally important dimensions. These include the epistemic, the moral, the agapic, the political, and the spiritual. All of these aspects were, from Spinoza's earliest writings, taken to coalesce in a single 'ethics'. Once it is appreciated that lying at the heart of this holistic way of life is fundamentally a kind of self-determination, 'divine' in its immanent source of activity, all of these otherwise diverse aspects come to be seen as indeed parallel expressions of that same underlying freedom or autonomy. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza had put this in terms of an almost 'either-or' pair of alternative states, a divide to be crossed with a single 'road to Damascus' transformative episode. But in the *Ethics* this gives way to a more 'conative' and ongoing process of continually striving to express oneself autonomously and in doing so partake in a quality of life which is to some degree free, enlightened, virtuous, and even... eternal. This by itself is sufficient to corroborate the central claim of this dissertation, i.e., that freedom plays an indispensable role in the workings of Spinoza's mature eschatology. But there are further reasons still for resituating this notion at the centre of our attempts to understand Spinoza's notion of the eternity of the mind.

Foremost among these is the specific relevance of the notion of freedom in elucidating the eternity of the mind as, specifically, a 'freedom from death'. In Chapter 6, it was found that, just as the diverse aspects which together make up Spinoza's rich conception of the ethical each in their own way involve a kind of liberation, so too does this specifically eschatological aspect. So, in addition to providing an explanation for the unity underlying all these aspects, and providing the essential resonance in the quality of life called 'eternal', freedom also characterises that specific aspect relating to human mortality, supplying the meaning of the expression 'eternal life'. It is this specific freedom from death that will be further explored in this chapter. That the notion of freedom provides an invaluable

interpretative key for unlocking the puzzle of the eternity of the mind is evident from the definitions of the two operative concepts, 'freedom' and 'eternity'. In the *Ethics*, both notions are defined in terms of a kind of existence that flows from the nature of the entity in question, with perhaps the only difference being one of emphasis. Whereas the definition of freedom stresses the *origins* of this quality of existence (i.e. the nature of the thing in question), that of eternity stresses the *necessity* with which this quality of existence is expressed, a necessity that could also be glossed as a kind of immanent causality.[2] Thus, 'that thing is called free which exists from the necessity of *its nature alone*, and is determined to act *by itself alone*', whereas by 'eternity I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to *follow necessarily* from the definition alone of the eternal thing'.[3]

The shared content of the two notions is therefore supplied by the notion of 'necessity', suggesting an intimate triumvirate made up of freedom, eternity, and necessity, each of which is to be understood in terms of the other two. Thus, freedom and eternity can be seen to occupy the same 'conceptual space' in Spinoza's thought, in light of their shared relation to necessity. Contrary to 'incompatibilist' conceptions of freedom, according to which freedom consists in the *absence* of necessity, Spinoza opted for a 'compatibilist' concept, such that freedom is necessity itself, so long as the necessity with which one exists can be traced back to one's own nature. At the same time, '[e]ternity is the very essence [or nature] of God insofar as this involves necessary existence'.[4] Therefore, to the extent that one exists necessarily from one's own nature, and is thus free, one is to some extent divine in one's participation in an eternal kind of existence (i.e. 'the very essence [or nature] of God').

Beyond the conceptual workings of the notion of freedom, in both Spinoza's broader ethical picture and in his doctrine of the eternity of the mind, is the more biographical significance that this concept clearly held for Spinoza. For in addition to casting light on the internal logic of that doctrine - both in itself and how it hangs together with the rest of his philosophy - it becomes clear in a meta-conceptual way, how these ideas occurred to, and impressed themselves on, an intellectual who was

---

[2] 'Everything that is, is in God, and must be conceived through God… And then outside God there can be no substance… God, therefore, is the immanent [*immanens*], not the transitive cause of all things.' Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p18.

[3] Ibid. 1def7, emphasis added; 1def8, emphasis added.

[4] Ibid. 5p30dem.

deeply moved by the exigencies of human freedom. As explored in Chapter 6, freedom was important to Spinoza the philosopher because it was important to Spinoza the man. Born into a community displaced only one or two generations earlier from its native Iberia, by way of violent persecution and intolerance, Spinoza was from his youngest days inculcated with an awareness of the value of freedom. From this default position of awareness, he could only have grown further convinced of this ultimate human value during his own personal experience of rejection and exile, itself a result of intolerance. All the while, beyond his own personal struggles and those of his native Sephardic community, the unfolding antagonism between political-religious factions in the Dutch Republic would have struck his increasingly attuned sensibility for the menacing threat of tyranny that it was, itself dwarfed by a wider culture of intolerance and persecution blighting much of seventeenth-century Europe. With this historical context and biographical portrait in view, one can readily appreciate why the notion of freedom and, in particular, human freedom, came to figure so prominently in Spinoza's philosophy. The doctrine of the eternity of the mind is no different in this respect. Nevertheless, to make this point is not at all to engage in the dubious pursuit of psychologising the objective philosophical workings of these ideas themselves. There is nothing inconsistent in recognising the dual-significance that the notion of freedom held for Spinoza, both as it figures in his thought conceptually and why, biographically, it would have struck him all the more forcefully as being of profound importance.

An 'immanent', though not 'merely' Epicurean, eschatology

There is, then, in addition to the various kinds of freedom canvassed in Chapter 6 (epistemic, psychological, agapic, political, etc.), also a kind of freedom from the existential predicament posed by human mortality. Eternity is a timeless quality of existence. Therefore, to the extent that it is enjoyed, it renders a liberation of sorts, however briefly, from the inescapable conclusion awaiting finite things in time. Centuries later, Ludwig Wittgenstein (whose first major work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, seems to be named in allusion to the famous author of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*), would articulate this notion as follows:

> If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration, but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present. Our life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limits.[5]

As noted in Chapter 6, it is not so much that these various kinds of freedom open up distinct possibilities, capable of being independently realised, but rather that there is a single condition of freedom simultaneously expressed in all these different ways. In fulfilling one's essence as a human being, one actively forms adequate ideas, and ideas being not simply 'mute pictures on a panel [*picturas in tabula mutas*]', but being embodied in one's practical engagements with the world and with others, the rationality characteristic of 'the free man' manifests itself as much through a political engagement, as through a mastery of one's passions and a love for others.[6]

Indeed, all these complementary aspects would remain equally important and valuable even were the added spiritual benefits described in *Ethics* V not to follow:

> Even if we did not know that our mind is eternal, we would still regard as of the first importance morality, religion, and absolutely all the things we have shown (in Part IV) to be related to tenacity and nobility.[7]

But in fact this is a hypothetical abstraction from intrinsically connected aspects, a state of affairs which could not really come about, because with the former liberation in the form of 'tenacity [*animositas*]' and 'nobility [*generositas*]' comes the latter liberation in the form of the mind's eternity. Indeed, the whole force of Spinoza's 'philosophical' and 'immanent' reconfiguration of spirituality is to somehow identify it with (but without reducing it to) these other more earthly forms of freedom. Spinoza's suggestion seems to be that these complementary aspects hang together holistically, unified in a single quality of existence, or way of life, called 'freedom [*libertas*]', so that once the other 'things we have shown' are achieved, the freedom from death described in *Ethics* V is achieved as well. But it is undoubtedly this spiritual dimension, in particular, that Spinoza chose for the capstone of his philosophical edifice, giving it pride of place in the final climactic conclusion of the *Ethics*.

Thus the overall shape of Spinoza's mature eschatology, clear already from the examination of his concept of eternity in Chapter 2, is towards something which

---

[5] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), 6.4311.

[6] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p49s.

[7] Ibid. 5p41.

theologians have called 'realised eschatology', a term coined by Charles Dodd for his reading of the New Testament, according to which eschatological themes, such as the 'kingdom of heaven', the 'return of Christ', and 'eternal life', do not refer to events or states in the future, but rather to a kind of spiritual condition or relationship with the divine achievable in this life:

> [The parables in the New Testament] use all the resources of dramatic illustration to help men see that in the events before their eyes... God is confronting them in His kingdom, power and glory. This world has become the scene of a divine drama, in which the eternal issues are laid bare. It is the hour of decision. It is realised eschatology.[8]

Certain books in particular, such as those attributed to John, are thought to exemplify this reading of the New Testament. Carlisle has drawn attention to the affinity between such biblical passages and the eschatology of *Ethics* V. It is also worth remembering that, in addition to many references within the text itself, Spinoza chose to preface the *Theological-Political Treatise* with a quotation from the First Epistle of John: 'Through this means we recognise that we remain in God, and God remains in us - that He gave to us from His own Spirit.'[9] Eternal life, for Spinoza, is not at all a matter of living forever through endless time, but about partaking in a certain *timelessness* (in the here and now, or for a stretch of time, or from place to place), in which the usual boundaries of time somehow cease to be relevant to one's manner of existence or otherwise lose their force. In these states, one is no longer bound by the finitude of temporal existence and death loses its grip, rendering one 'without death', 'deathless', or - what comes to the same - 'immortal'.

There is a psychological aspect to this kind of deathlessness, but this is by no means exhaustive of Spinoza's eschatology. This psychological strand concerns the attitude of a person who exists freely from his or her nature. It is an existential attitude framed in terms of affirmation and directed towards life, rather than morbidly worrying about a negation of existence, or suffering from a fear of death. Since the conduct of a person living freely expresses a true knowledge of things, framed under a species of eternity, he or she attends to the real, 'inner' nature of things, and not merely to a 'superficial' grasp of them in terms of 'negation', 'imperfection', or 'death'. In Chapter 7, I explored the sense in which these latter

[8] Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, p. 147.

[9] Carlisle, 'Spinoza on Eternal Life', forthcoming. The epigraph of the TTP is taken from 1 John 4:13.

categories, for Spinoza, frame a superficial conception of things. Enfolding and consolidating this merely superficial conception into a fuller, richer conception is the achievement of the 'free man'. Spinoza explains at (4p67dem) that a 'free man, i.e., one who lives according to the dictate of reason alone... desires the good directly (by p63c), i.e. (by p24), acts, lives, and preserves his being from the foundation of seeking his own advantage.'[10] This kind of motivation is premised on affirmation and on life, the truly animating principle in nature. On the other hand, a free person cannot be said to be motivated by a 'negative affect' such as fear, nor, *inter alia*, by a fear of death: 'A free man... is not led by Fear... he thinks of nothing less than of death. Instead his wisdom is a meditation on life'.[11] For this reason, Spinoza's philosophy is indeed a 'philosophy of life', and his understanding of eternity is that of an 'eternity of life', not an 'eternity of death', as Sylvain Zac has put it.[12]

This psychological aspect of Spinoza's eschatology may well seem to situate him within a broader philosophical tradition of responding to the question of human mortality. In his famous garden in Athens, Epicurus too tried to assuage the fear of death felt by his interlocutors by means of rational argument.

> So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more.[13]

So the only explanation for suffering from such a fear would be a person's own irrationality, perhaps curable through exposure to arguments like that provided by Epicurus. This sentiment is indeed echoed in Spinoza's remarks about the free man, i.e. 'one who lives according to the dictate of reason alone'.[14] But, although there may seem to be a convergence between these two thinkers, there is in fact a great distance separating them. After all, Epicurus has usually been remembered for his early and influential formulation of what would now be called a 'materialist' conception of the world, whereas Spinoza, it has emerged over the course of this dissertation, worked out a far more inclusive vision, a striking feature of which is the equal status afforded to all attributes of substance (as opposed to only the 'material'

[10] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p67dem.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Zac, *L'idée de vie*, p. 15.

[13] Epicurus to Menoeceus, in *The Extant Remains*, ed. Cyril Bailey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 85.

[14] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p67dem.

or 'extended'). In fact, in Spinoza's treatment of the question, there occurs an interesting synthesis between this ancient, more 'purely' philosophical response, and subsequent 'theological' offerings.

It is therefore unsurprising that, although dispelling the fear of death features as an undeniable aspect of Spinoza's doctrine, it is by no means the whole story. It is true that, for Spinoza, the 'more the mind understands things by the second and third kind of knowledge, the less it is acted on by affects which are evil, and the less it fears death'.[15] But this is accompanied also by what might be referred to as the 'metaphysical point' of the doctrine:

> [B]ecause (by p27) the highest satisfaction there can be arises from the third kind of knowledge, it follows from this that the human mind *can be of such a nature* that the part of the mind which we have shown perishes with the body (see p21) is of no moment in relation to *what remains*.[16]

In order to make sense of this additional 'metaphysical point' of Spinoza's eschatology it is necessary to address two questions. Firstly, who - or what - exactly, is eternal? Secondly, what can it mean to say that this - the answer to the first question - 'remains'?

Who - or what - is eternal?

One of the difficulties standing in the way of a straightforward reading of the eternity of the mind passage in *Ethics* V is that it seems unclear just what the referent of this quality of existence - eternity - is supposed to be. On the face of it, the passage seems to be concerned with a quality of 'the mind' *simpliciter*.[17] But Spinoza also seems to slide from elaborating this quality in connection with 'the mind' (and, at times, even more generically, to 'us') to reserving this special status for 'something of [the mind]', 'the Mind *only insofar as* it conceives the Body's essence under a species of eternity', or for only a 'part of it'.[18] Are these latter specifications more precise refinements of what are elsewhere more general or casual references to 'the mind' as a whole (or to 'us'), or is there some rationale behind this variety in

[15] Ibid. 5p38.

[16] Ibid. 5p38dem.

[17] Ibid. 5p20s and *passim*.

[18] Ibid. 5p23s; 5p23; 5p29dem, emphasis added; 5p38.

Spinoza's presentation of the doctrine? If it turns out that there is an ambiguity in Spinoza's account here, what would this mean for his apparently univocal conception of eternity? Is there just one single quality of eternity being ascribed, or are there rather distinct kinds of eternity (each applicable to its own respective referent)? Thus Nadler, for example, has claimed that it is 'absolutely crucial to see that there are two distinct kinds of eternity' at work here, warning that a 'failure to distinguish them can lead one into various kinds of misreadings of Spinoza's views on the eternity of the mind'.[19] Nadler is not, in this context, distinguishing between the 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' conceptions of eternity examined in Chapter 2. The kinds of eternity Nadler is referring to here correspond instead to a difference in what is said to *be* eternal, a difference in the 'extension' of the term which, it turns out, engenders a difference in its 'intension' also.

The 'two distinct kinds of eternity' are, on the one hand, something which Nadler calls a 'very minimal kind of eternity' enjoyed by '*all* things, human and otherwise', simply in virtue of there being a timeless essence for each and every individual contained in the attributes, and, on the other hand, 'another variety of eternity' which is special in being 'available *only* to human minds'.[20] It would presumably be due to a 'failure to distinguish' between these two kinds of eternity were one to read Spinoza as 'saying aloud: "the human mind is in a certain sense eternal"', but then 'adding in a whisper, for the few who could penetrate his secret: - "and everything else too"', as Pollock once put the temptation.[21] With the distinction in view, Spinoza's 'secret' whereby 'everything else' is as eternal as the human mind, so that there is perhaps no special eschatological significance attached to the human mind in particular, can be attributed to the more 'minimal' variety of eternity described by Nadler. That is, it follows as a rather straightforward consequence of Spinoza's general metaphysical picture that for every individual there is an essence somehow eternally contained in the attributes of God. This is perhaps also the kind of eternity that the mind 'as a whole' can be said to enjoy within the attribute of thought *qua* idea-correlate of the essence of the body, which is also, in its own way, contained timelessly in the attribute of extension.

---

[19] Nadler, 'Eternity and Immortality', p. 229, note 23. Moreau is generally credited with having highlighted the importance of this distinction. Moreau, *Spinoza*, p. 540.

[20] Nadler, 'Eternity and Immortality', pp. 231-2.

[21] Pollock, *Spinoza*, p. 295.

This seems to be the import of (5p22) and (5p23), according to which, 'in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human Body, under a species of eternity', and so also 'something that pertains to the essence of the human Mind'.[22] But it turns out that the 'essence of the human Mind' is of such a peculiar nature that it enables participation in what Nadler describes as a kind of eternity 'available *only* to human minds'. Nadler is correct to highlight the special relationship that holds between a human mind and its own eternity. As Spinoza puts it at (5p23s), 'we feel and know by experience that we are eternal [*sentimus experimurque nos æternos esse*]'. That is, our distinctively conscious and rational mental life renders our own eternity a matter for reflective awareness. But more than this, the extent to which we share in this quality of existence is a function of that very same rational activity and lived 'life of the mind': for the 'Mind's essence consists in knowledge (by 2p11); therefore, the more the Mind knows things by the second and third kind of knowledge, the greater the part of it that remains'.[23] In the case of the self-necessitating existence with which human beings are capable of actively identifying (which is available for them to do as and when they freely take up an 'authentic' way of life), this sense of one's own eternity, for Spinoza, seems to stand in a reciprocal cycle of generation with that eternity itself. There is thus a kind of circle here, though not one that is obviously problematic or 'vicious'.

This points towards a rationale in Spinoza's varied ascription of eternity to 'us [*nos*]', to 'the mind [*mens*]', and sometimes to 'a part of the mind [*pars mentis*]'. For these distinct bearers of the quality are in fact related to each other in a straightforward sequence. To begin with, Spinoza is clearly concerned, above all, with human beings. He maintains that 'we feel and know... that *we* are eternal [*nos æternos esse*]'.[24] But, in virtue of what are *we* eternal? At this point, it is important to remember that the essence of (a truly) human existence, for Spinoza, consists in a 'life of the mind'. In the *Political Treatise*, he stresses 'a human life, which is characterised not just by the circulation of the blood and other features common to all animals, but especially by reason, the true virtue and life of the mind'.[25] So if one's share of eternity turns on the extent to which one lives 'authentically' and in synch with one's nature or essence, then one's eternity will clearly turn on the extent

[22] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p22, 5p23.

[23] Ibid. 5p38dem.

[24] Ibid. 5p23s, emphasis added.

[25] Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, ch. 5, p. 62.

to which one lives this 'life of the mind'. But the life of the mind is, specifically, a *rational* life of the mind, in which one has actively formed adequate ideas about the world and one's place in it, which, far from being 'mute pictures on a panel' to be enjoyed in a detached sphere of ethereal contemplation, are instead concretely manifest in one's practical engagements with the world and with others. Because there is no gap between some supposedly inert content of an idea and a subsequent 'mental attitude' towards it, but instead ideas are inherently active, and so *consist* in their practical manifestations, the 'part of the mind' that Spinoza calls 'rational' really refers to a whole set of patterns of human behaviour and interactions. This 'part of the mind', is therefore only a 'part' in a somewhat metaphorical sense, but it is this 'part' that, to the extent that it is consciously *felt* to be eternal, Spinoza regards as eternal. It is crucial to add this extra experiential requirement in light of the reciprocal dependence, mentioned above, between one's eternity and one's awareness of one's eternity.

However, this 'part' of the human mind, to the extent that it consists in a truly authentic engagement with the world, is in fact also 'part' of God's eternal intellect, as proven at (2p11c): 'the human Mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God'. In this realisation of one's nature, an exercise of the specifically rational 'part' of the mind at the same time invites an acknowledgement of one's identity with God or Nature, and this in turn triggers a conscious illumination of one's own existence as something shared with the rest of a divine, yet natural, world.

> [T]he wise man, insofar as he is considered as such, is hardly troubled in spirit, but being, by a certain eternal necessity, conscious of himself, and of God, and of things, he never ceases to be, but always possesses true peace of mind [*vera animi acquiescentia*].[26]

Again, when Spinoza describes the human mind as 'part' of God's intellect, this can only be a metaphorical use of the term 'part', since the human mind, in a sense, transcends its own particularity and identifies with the *whole* of God or Nature. In an earlier work, Spinoza describes this conscious convergence between the human and divine as 'knowledge of the union that the mind has with the whole of Nature'.[27] Similarly, he speaks of the capacity 'for our mind to reproduce [*referat*] completely the likeness of Nature'.[28] Given his gradual eschewal of the more dualistic account

[26] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p42s.

[27] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §13.

[28] Ibid. §42.

of the mind in his earlier works and the eventual statement of parallelism in the *Ethics*, even the notion of 'reproducing' here - if that is the most apposite rendering of the Latin - would seem insufficient to capture the much stronger sense in which Spinoza envisages this union between the finite and infinite to take place. Perhaps better suited to this intention is the notion of 'constitution', which need not boil down to mere aggregation. Elsewhere, for example, Spinoza refers to a community of minds that jointly '*constitute* God's eternal and infinite intellect [*Dei æternum et infinitum intellectum constituant*]'.[29]

The special relationship that obtains between a human mind and its own quality of eternity is, then, a function of several traits peculiar to its nature or essence. Firstly, there is, as Harris puts it, a kind of 'transcendental self-overcoming' in the enjoyment of true knowledge, a movement towards grasping a world *around* oneself, or beyond the limits of one's body.[30] This apparently paradoxical synthesis between the perspective of the individual and an identification with a wider context in which one is embedded is, Harris suggests, precisely the point in Spinoza's philosophy where the two incongruent categories of the finite and the infinite are finally reconciled. Secondly, this quality of eternity can be directly felt or experienced, that is, it can feature as the object of one's reflective awareness: 'we feel and know by experience that we are eternal'.[31] As discussed in Chapter 4, this capacity for self-awareness, or consciousness, is a result of the inherent complexity in both the human organism and its social context. Systems within systems, within yet more systems, are, under the attribute of thought, sufficient to trigger a reflexive act through which one becomes the object of one's own awareness. Thirdly, in striving to consummate this intrinsic human capacity for simultaneous knowledge of both self and other, it becomes a conscious endeavour to achieve this as far as possible. In actively seeking true knowledge, expressed in an 'authentic' manner of existence with consequences for one's interactions with others as much as for personal salvation, a human being lives in accordance with his or her nature, or 'exists from the necessity of [his or her] nature alone, and is determined to act by [his-or-herself] alone', that is, he or she is free.[32] But a quality of existence by which something lives or acts from the necessity of its own nature (as encapsulated in that thing's true definition) is also

[29] Ibid. 5p40s, emphasis added.

[30] Harris, 'Spinoza's Theory', p. 255.

[31] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p23s.

[32] Ibid. 1def7.

precisely that which Spinoza calls eternity, i.e., 'existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing'.[33] Thus it is this quality of existence called 'eternity' that is peculiarly felt and pursued by a human mind, as embodied in the fullness of human life.

One 'remaining' question

If some sense can be made of what exactly it is that is eternal, there remains at least one unresolved aporia. Giving rise to this remaining bump in the carpet is that which I have called the 'metaphysical point' of the doctrine. For Spinoza's eschatology is about more than the psychological benefits accrued from an Epicurean treatment of the question, precisely because of the ontology underlying the claim that 'the human mind *can be of such a nature* that the part of the mind which we have shown perishes with the body (see p21) is of no moment in relation to *what remains*'.[34] How can the eternity of the mind be essentially about a quality of existence attainable in 'this life', if there is, as Spinoza says, 'something' of the mind which 'cannot be absolutely destroyed with the Body... [but] *remains*'?[35] How can his doctrine be *both* more than just therapy aimed at alleviating the anxiety occasioned by human mortality, *and* nonetheless still fundamentally something I have been calling a 'philosophical' reinterpretation of the more supernatural doctrines found in mainstream Abrahamic theology? Contrary to the kind of interpretation that has emerged in this dissertation as a result of taking the eternity of the mind to be a form of realised eschatology, Spinoza in these remarks seems almost to countenance a kind of 'afterlife'.

One possibility for reconciling the general interpretative approach with such remarks is, like Harris, to translate the language in which they are expressed into a 'timeless idiom'. It is, for example, in such a timeless idiom that one can speak of two 'remaining' when five is divided by three.[36] This strategy does indeed have something going for it, given the adoption of a 'qualitative' reading of Spinoza's concept of eternity, since this has to be understood as a *timeless* form of existence,

[33] Ibid. 1def8.

[34] Ibid. 5p38s, emphasis added.

[35] Ibid. 5p23s, emphasis added.

[36] Harris, 'Spinoza's Theory', p. 250.

and thus anything which, in virtue of being eternal, is said to 'remain' after the death of the body, must presumably do so in a timeless way. But, all things considered, it must be admitted that this strategy might ultimately seem insufficient to accommodate the implied temporality in these remarks, indeed, the implied *continuation* of 'something' beyond the death of the body.

Another possibility is to acknowledge a certain temporality in Spinoza's claim that 'something remains', but maintain that this is nonetheless consistent with the interpretation developed so far. This might be done in various ways. The first of these would be to credit Spinoza with having substantiated, in the terms of his metaphysical system, something which might be called an 'afterlife of legacy'. In order to gain true knowledge, framed under a species of eternity, a person must in doing so appreciate his or her own existence under that same aspect:

> [B]ecause it is of the nature of reason to conceive things under a species of eternity (by 2p44c2), and it also pertains to the nature of the Mind to conceive the Body's essence under a species of eternity (by p23), and beyond these two, nothing else pertains to the Mind's essence (by 2p13), this power of conceiving things under a species of eternity pertains to the Mind only insofar as it conceives the Body's essence under a species of eternity.[37]

In virtue of this 'noetic union', discussed in Chapter 5, when one grasps the existence of things *sub specie æternitatis*, one thereby becomes part of that which can be grasped, or, *insofar* as one's essence consists in the rational apprehension of the existence of things (that is, insofar as the 'mind', or 'something of the mind', characterises one's fundamental nature), 'one' thereby becomes part of the whole which is universally available to any rational mind to grasp. Again, this is the self-generating 'circle' mentioned above. The universally available conception of the totality of things under their eternal, which is to say, their 'divine', aspect, is precisely that which, in a very real sense, 'remains', because it is ever-present.

This would not be a deflationary rendering of the language of 'remaining', but nor would Spinoza be helping himself to anything beyond an essentially 'realised' or 'this-life' eschatology. Those episodes of a person's life which manifest the possession of adequate ideas are precisely those episodes in which a person lives according to his or her 'inmost essence', making such episodes part and parcel of the same conception of things *sub specie æternitatis* of which those episodes are themselves manifestations. This, again, is the reciprocal circle, which is also why the

[37] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p29dem.

eternity of a person's mind is fundamentally something to be experienced *by* that person. In other words, these aspects of a person's life are 'authentic', as opposed to 'superficial'. As discussed in Chapter 7, a conception of things *sub specie æternitatis* attends to things insofar as they exist according to their 'inmost essence', and not in terms of 'extrinsic denominations, relations, or... circumstances', which can amount to only a 'superficial' grasp of them.[38]

One can therefore experience one's own participation in this eternal conception of things, but, moreover, that participation itself becomes available as part of that same conception, *whoever* might conceive it. There is thus, on this reading, a distinction between the subjectivity of one's eternity and the objectivity of those same occurrences of subjectivity, no longer being experienced *by* the subject, but nonetheless part of the objective conception of things *sub specie aeternitatis*. In this way, Spinoza's 'naturalised' or 'philosophical' alternative to a supernatural eschatology involves a certain 'afterlife of legacy'. This is the widely held belief, particularly in more secular societies, that loved ones live on in our memory, if not in some supernatural dwelling. What Spinoza has done, however, is to have woven this common sentiment into a formidable and unified metaphysical doctrine, lending substance to a widespread but perhaps insecurely held belief, so that even if one day there were no one around to conceive these aspects of things *sub specie æternitatis*, that overall conception would still, in Spinoza's metaphysical sense, 'remain'.

Once again, however, this interpretative option may seem insufficient to capture Spinoza's intentions. For one thing, although this version of an 'afterlife of legacy' is, in his hands, given a more substantive, metaphysical twist, nonetheless there may seem to be something overly deflationary in such a reading. For Spinoza does seem to be trying to articulate a kind of eternity of one's *mind* (or part thereof), which, experienced as such, 'remains' after the death of the body. Abstracting from this personal experience to the thoughts of others might be thought to fall short of Spinoza's ambitions in this passage. Possibly less deflationary would be to defer to the 'thoughts' of God, or to God's infinite intellect. Whether or not one's lived moments of eternity are acknowledged as such by others, they could be said to remain in God's - timeless - conception of things, to be in some sense contained as eternal essences in God's attributes. One is tempted to reach for the term 'archetypes' here, though to do so would seem to conflict with the immanence with

[38] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §101.

which such essences inform the individual things of which they are essences. Nonetheless, such a reading might work by drawing a connection between the two kinds of eternity discussed above. That is, because for each thing there is an essence somehow contained in God's attributes, we human beings, in common with everything else, could be said to enjoy the first, 'very minimal kind of eternity', as Nadler refers to it. It is this 'minimal kind of eternity' that in a timeless sense 'remains' in the fabric of God's nature, as expressed through the attributes and, in turn, the infinite and eternal modes. We human beings, however, also enjoy the second kind of eternity described above, in virtue of our own experience of it. This second kind of eternity, clearly understood in terms of the 'here and now', is perhaps equally 'encoded' in the timeless essence which expresses our entire existence. So in these moments we can be said to experience an essence that 'remains' beyond the death of the body, an essence that includes these very moments themselves, but only 'objectively' when they are no longer being experienced as such.

The diffident and speculative nature of these various possibilities suggest a final evaluation that must remain somewhat qualified and nuanced. The moral to be gleaned from this discussion would seem to be that there might never be any fully confident resolution of these tensions in Spinoza's mature eschatology. However, far from leaving a dissatisfying question mark over the issue, this very result can be taken to point towards a positive conclusion, albeit one that, for these same reasons, must remain tentative. That is, it may be the very nature of the question at hand that renders it unresolvable in the language and ratiocination of philosophical discourse. If the third kind of cognition, *scientia intuitiva*, consists in an immediate flash of understanding, then it is perhaps simply incapable of being captured in the step-by-step reasoning of the second kind of cognition, *ratio*. I suggested in Chapter 5 that it is these moments of immediate intellectual perception, in particular, that engender the intensity involved in experiencing one's eternity, as described in *Ethics* V. Keeping this in view, it is perhaps less surprising that the essentially ratiocinative structure of the *Ethics*, including Part V, must ultimately fall short of capturing what can only be experienced for oneself. What can be conjectured with more confidence is that Spinoza himself appears to have experienced these intense feelings of his own eternity and union with 'the whole of Nature', and evidently felt compelled to try his utmost to convey this to his readers, even if the only way to do so was through the ultimately inadequate medium of *ratio*. Indeed, he seems aware of this when he

acknowledges the somewhat attenuated status of his discussion: 'although we are already certain that the mind is eternal... we will consider the mind itself, *as though* it had just begun to exist'.[39]

General conclusion

It remains only to assess the merits - or failings - of this idiosyncratic response to the perennial question of human mortality. Firstly, is the doctrine of the eternity of the mind presented in *Ethics* V warranted by, or even consistent with, the rest of the philosophical system developed in the text? Some commentators have not hesitated to reject this final flourish as, not only an unfortunate flight from the meticulous logic of the first four parts of the work, but as a kind of intellectual faux pas forever tarnishing Spinoza's reputation. Bennett, for example, famously lamented what he took to be a complete lapse of sanity in these pages, but suggested that this particular piece of dead fruit could nevertheless be pruned away to salvage what was still on the whole a healthy philosophical tree. This is the preferred treatment of those who look to the *Ethics* for a kind of early modern manifesto for what would eventually blossom in the twentieth century as a philosophy of 'physicalism', according to which all phenomena are ultimately reducible to physical particles and processes. But in light of all that has emerged in the course of this dissertation, it should be clear that this particular appropriation of Spinoza's philosophy betrays the richness of a system that he both envisaged and, more or less, succeeded in constructing.

Far from recommending a reduction of all phenomena to the 'physical' or, in his language, the 'extended', Spinoza made it clear that this is only one among many, indeed *infinitely* many, aspects (or 'attributes') of the world. Even more critically, however, the suggestion that the final passages of the *Ethics* could constitute an optional appendage to Spinoza's larger philosophical system, that one is free to either 'take it or leave it', would in fact deprive the system as a whole of the final denouement that these passages supply. As Harris has put it, it is precisely at this point in Spinoza's philosophy where the otherwise glaring tension between the

[39] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p31s, emphasis added.

infinite and the finite is finally resolved. Although at one point Spinoza seems to characterise the eschatology of *Ethics* V as an optional extra, suggesting that even 'if we did not know that our mind is eternal, we would still regard as of the first importance morality, religion, and absolutely all the things we have shown', this can only be from the point of view of what people know.[40] That is, it is not necessary for the 'multitude' to understand this recondite philosophical reconciliation between the infinite and the finite for them to understand and appreciate the benefits of morality and true religion. But for those who do follow Spinoza's reasoning up to this point, the doctrine of the eternity of the mind provides the piece of the puzzle required for the final coherence of the system as a whole.

Secondly, and over and above the question of how the doctrine hangs together with the rest of Spinoza's philosophy, can it be said to provide a satisfying response to the question of human mortality? In response to this, it might be ventured that an assessment of the doctrine's success must turn on the extent to which one accepts the characterisation Spinoza gives of the quality of life he calls 'eternal', and, as discussed above, it becomes at this point perhaps a matter of personal experience as to whether one recognises the kind of existential condition involved. As has been elaborated in this chapter, the condition in question is one of affirmation and conscious identification with the principle of life animating and unifying the world in which one finds oneself. As Zac has articulated it, Spinoza's philosophy is in a sense a philosophy of life. God or Nature, considered as the fundamental and all-encompassing principle of existence, is really life itself, and to the extent that one consciously identifies with this eternal and divine principle, one attends to the positive expression of existence, and not to its negation, death. To live in union with this principle is therefore to live a life free of death.

While the intricacies of Spinoza's metaphysical supplement to a purely psychological freedom from death must remain somewhat obscure, and perhaps even defy any merely ratiocinative treatment, the principal thesis of this dissertation - that Spinoza's conception of freedom plays an indispensable role in his mature eschatology - has, I hope, been vindicated. With freedom and eternity occupying the same conceptual space, for Spinoza, it becomes clear in what way the quality of existence involved in the eternity of the mind consists in a condition of human freedom. Eternity is 'existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily

[40] Ibid. 5p41.

from the definition alone of the eternal thing', a thing that is therefore free, precisely because it 'exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone'.[41] As human beings, we strive to live freely in accordance with our 'inmost essence', and to the extent that we succeed in doing so, we join together in a shared pursuit of knowledge, love and spiritual fulfilment. In the autonomous expression of one's true essence, which is to rationally apprehend an all-embracing Nature within which one lives (and in doing so acknowledge a union with it), one breaks free from the external constraints of time and place peculiar to one's parochial and 'superficial' vantage point, and exists freely (i.e., from one's own nature) and eternally (i.e., timelessly). The vicissitudes of 'fortune', in the form of unpredictable encounters with other finite things around us (including each other), have the potential to confuse this shared pursuit by casting a 'superficial' shadow of our true selves. We are thus our own greatest danger. Spinoza does not think that these conflicting human tendencies are destined to align once and for all in the utopian completion of an unfolding logic, leaving the unpredictability and practical tensions of society behind. Rather we remain responsible at all times for our own freedom and must face any threat to it as and when it arises.

[41] Ibid. 1def8, 1def7.

Bibliography

Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils. Edited by Norman P. Tanner. Washington D.C.: Sheed & Ward, 1990.

Albiac, Gabriel. *La synagogue vide: les source marranes du spinozisme*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994.

Allison, Henry E. 'Spinoza's Doctrine of the Eternity of the Mind'. *Spinoza: Issues and Directions*, edited by Edwin Curley and Pierre-François Moreau. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990.

Anderson, Ray S. *Theology, Death and Dying*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

Antognazza, Maria Rosa. 'Rationalism'. In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics*, edited by Roger Crisp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Aquinas, St. Thomas. *De unitate intellectus contra averroistas*. Paris, 1270.

—— *Summa Theologiæ*, 60 vols. Translated, with Latin text, introductions, notes, appendices, and glossaries, by the English Dominican Fathers. London: Blackfriars, 1963.

Aristotle. *The Works of Aristotle*. Translated by William D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930.

—— *Categoriæ*. Edited by William D. Ross. Vol. I, *The Works of Aristotle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930.

—— *Physica*. Edited by William D. Ross. Vol. II, *The Works of Aristotle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930.

—— *De Anima*. Edited by William D. Ross. Vol. III, *The Works of Aristotle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930.

—— *Metaphysica*. Edited by William D. Ross. Vol. XIII, *The Works of Aristotle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930.

Armour, Leslie. 'Knowledge, Idea, and Spinoza's Notion of Immortality'. In *Spinoza: The Enduring Questions*, edited by Graeme Hunter. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.

Augustine, *De diversis quæstionibus*. Edited by Almut Mutzenbecher. Turnhout: Brepols, 1975.

Balibar, Étienne. *Spinoza and Politics*. Translated by Peter Snowdon. London: Verso, 1998.

Bayle, Pierre. *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*. Translated by Robert Bartlett. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.

—— *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. Translated by Richard Popkin. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965.

Berlin, Isaiah. *Two Concepts of Liberty*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958.

Bobro, Marc. 'Prudence and the Concern to Survive in Leibniz's Doctrine of Immortality', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1998), 303-22.

Boucher, Wayne I. *Spinoza: Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Discussions*. Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1999.

Beiser, Frederick C. *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Bell, David. *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the age of Goethe*. London: Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1984.

Bennett, Jonathan. *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Translated by David R. Slavitt. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Caird, John. *Spinoza*. London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1888.

Carlisle, Clare. 'Spinoza on Eternal Life', in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (2015), forthcoming.

Colerus, John. *The Life of Benedict de Spinosa*. London: D.L., 1706.

Cousin, Victor. *Fragments philosophiques*, 4 vols. Paris: Ladrange, 1826.

Cronin, Timothy J. *Objective Being in Descartes and in Suarez*. Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1966.

Curley, Edwin. *Spinoza's Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation*. Harvard: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

—— *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's* Ethics. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Dalbiez, Roland. 'Les sources scolastiques de la théorie cartésienne de l'être objectif. À propos du 'Descartes' de M. Gilson', *Revue d'Histoire de la Philosophie* 3 (1929), 464-72.

De Dijn, Herman. 'The Good and the True', in *Transformation der Metaphysik in die Moderne*, edited by Michael Czelinski, Robert Schnepf, and Manfred Walther. Würzberg: Konigshausen & Neumann, 2003, 78-87.

—— 'Spinoza on Knowledge and Religion'. In *Religio Academici: Essays on Scepticism, Religion, and the Pursuit of Knowledge*, edited by Péter Losonczi. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2009.

De La Rocca, Michael. *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Delbos, Victor. *Le problème moral dans la philosophie de Spinoza et dans l'histoire du Spinozisme*. Paris: Ancienne Librairie Germer Baillière et C^{ie}, 1893.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*. Paris: Les Èditions de Minuit, 1968.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Descartes, René. *Oeuvres de Descartes*. Edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery. Paris: Vrin, 1964-76.

—— *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*. Edited by Charles Adam Tannery, vol. VII. *Oeuvres de Descartes*. Paris: Vrin, 1964-76.

—— *Principia Philosophiæ*. Edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, vol. VIII. *Oeuvres de Descartes*. Paris: Vrin, 1964-76.

—— *Discours de la Méthode*. Edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, vol. XI. *Oeuvres de Descartes*. Paris: Vrin, 1964-76.

—— *Treatise on Man*. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

—— *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

—— *Principles of Philosophy*. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

—— *The Passions of the Soul*. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

—— *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Dodd, Charles H. *The Parables of the Kingdom*. London: William Clowes and Sons, 1935.

Donagan, Alan. 'Spinoza's Proof of Immortality'. In *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Marjorie Grene. New York: Anchor Press, 1973.

—— *Spinoza*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989.

Douglas, Alexander. 'Spinoza and the Dutch Cartesians on Philosophy and Theology', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51, no. 4 (2013), 567-88.

Eckstein, Walter. 'Rousseau and Spinoza: Their Political Theories and their Conception of Ethical Freedom. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 5, no. 3 (1944), 259-91.

Einstein, Albert. *Ideas and Opinions*. Edited by Carl Seelig. New York: Crown Publishers, 1954.

Epicurus. *The Extant Remains*. Translated by Cyril Bailey. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926.

Feuer, Lewis S. *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958.

Foti, Veronique M. 'Spinoza's Doctrine of Immortality and the Unity of Love', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 17, no. 4 (1979), 437-442.

Freudenthal, Jacob. 'Spinozastudien', *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 108 (1896), 238-82.

Garber, Daniel. 'A Free Man Thinks of Nothing Less Than of Death: Spinoza on the Eternity of the Mind'. In *Early Modern Philosophy: Mind, Matter & Metaphysics*, edited by Christia Mercer and Eileen O'Neill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 103-18.

Garber, Daniel, and Michael Ayers. *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Garrett, Don. 'Spinoza on the Essence of the Human Body and the Part of the Mind that is Eternal'. In *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Metaphysics*, edited by Olli Koistinin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Gebhardt, Carl. 'Spinoza und der Platonismus', *Chronicon Spinozanum* 1 (1921), 178-234.

Gilson, Étienne. *Index scolastico-cartésien*. Paris: Félix Alcan, 1913.

Grene, Marjorie. *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*. New York: Anchor Press, 1973.

Gueroult, Martial. *Spinoza*, 2 vols. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1968.

Hallett, Harold F. 'Spinoza's Conception of Eternity', *Mind* 37, no. 147 (1928), 283-303.

Hampshire, Stuart. *Spinoza*. London: Penguin, 1951.

—— *Spinoza and the Idea of Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961.

—— 'Spinoza's Theory of Human Freedom', *The Monist* 55 (1971), 554-66.

Hardin, C. L. 'Spinoza on Immortality and Time', *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 3 (1977), 129-38.

Harris, Errol E. *Salvation from Despair: A Reappraisal of Spinoza's Philosophy*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973.

—— 'Spinoza's Theory of Human Immortality'. In *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*, edited by Maurice Mandelbaum and Eugene Freeman. La Salle: Open Court Press, 1973, 245-62.

Haserot, Francis S. 'Spinoza's Definition of Attribute', *Philosophical Review* 62, no. 4 (1953), 499-513.

Hatfield, Gary. 'The Cognitive Faculties'. In *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, vol. II. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Werke in zwanzig bänden*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980.

—— *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Translated by E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967.

Heine, Heinrich. *Werke in fünf bänden*. Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1981.

Herder, Johann Gottfried von. *God: Some Conversations*. Translated by Frederick H. Burkhardt. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1940.

Hunt, John. *An Essay on Pantheism*. London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1866.

Jacobi, Friedrich. *Ueber die Lehre von Spinoza in Briefen an Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*. Breslau: Gottlieb Löwe, 1785.

Israel, Jonathan. *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

James, Susan. 'Spinoza the Stoic'. In *The Rise of Modern Philosophy: The Tension between the New and Traditional Philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibniz*, edited by Tom Sorrel. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 289-316.

—— 'Power and Difference: Spinoza's Conception of Freedom', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 4, no. 3 (1996), 207-28.

—— 'Freedom, Slavery, and the Passions'. In *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*, edited by Ollo Koistinin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 223-41.

—— *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Joachim, Harold H. *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901.

—— *Spinoza's Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940.

Kisner, Matthew. *Spinoza on Human Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Kolakowski, Leszek. *Chrétiens sans église: La conscience religieuse et le lien confessionel au XII^e siècle*. Translated into French by Anna Posner. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.

Kneale, Martha. 'Eternity and Sempiternity', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 69 (1968), 223-38.

Kneale, William. 'Time and Eternity in Theology', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 61 (1960), 87-108.

Lærke, Mogens. *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza: La genèse d'une opposition complexe*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008.

—— 'The problem of *Alloglossia*. Leibniz on Spinoza's Innovative Use of Philosophical Language', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 17, no. 5 (2009), 939-53.

LeBuffe, Michael. *From Bondage to Freedom: Spinoza on Human Excellence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm von. *Remarques critiques de Leibniz d'apres le manuscrit original, de la bibliothèque royale de hanovre*. In *Réfutation inédite de Spinoza par Leibniz*, edited by Louis A. Foucher de Careil. Paris: Ladrange, 1854.

—— *Opuscules et fragments inédits*. Edited by Louis Couturat. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1961.

—— *G.W. Leibniz, Philosophical Papers and Letters*. Edited by Leroy E. Loemker. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.

—— 'On Nature Itself, or on the Inherent Force and Actions of Created Things'. In *G.W. Leibniz, Philosophical Papers and Letters*, edited by Leroy E. Loemker. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956.

Lloyd, Genevieve. 'Spinoza's Version of the Eternity of the Mind', in *Spinoza and the Sciences*, edited by Marjorie Grene and Debra Nails. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986, 211-33.

Mandelbaum, Maurice, and Eugene Freeman. *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*. La Salle: Open Court Press, 1973.

Martineau, James. *A Study of Spinoza*. London: MacMillan and Co., 1882.

Matheron, Alexandre. *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969.

Matson, Wallace. 'Body Essence and Mind Eternity in Spinoza'. In *Spinoza: Issues and Directions*, edited by Edwin Curley and Pierre-François Moreau. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990.

Mendelssohn, Moses. *Morning Hours: Lectures on God's Existence*. Daniel O. Dahlstrom and Corey Dyck. Dordrecht: Springer Verlag, 2011.

Meinsma, Koenraad O. *Spinoza et son cercle: Étude historique critique sur les heterodoxies hollandaise*. Translated into French by S. Roosenberg and J.-P. Osier. Paris: Vrin, 1983.

Mignini, Filippo. 'Per la datazione e l'interpretazione del *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* di B. Spinoza', *La Cultura* 17 (1979), 97-160.

—— 'Un documento trascurato della revisione spinoziana del Breve Trattato', *La Cultura* 18 (1980), 223-73.

Moreau, Pierre-François. *Spinoza: L'expérience et l'éternité*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de Frances, 1994.

Morrison, James. 'Spinoza on the Self, Personal Identity, and Immortality'. In *Spinoza: The Enduring Questions*, edited by Graeme Hunter. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994, 31-47.

Murphy, Jeffrie G. 'Rationality and the Fear of Death', *The Monist* 59 (1976), 187-203.

Nadler, Steven. 'Eternity and Immortality in Spinoza's *Ethics*', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2002), 224-44.

—— *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001.

—— 'Spinoza the Atheist', *New Humanist*, 121, no. 2 (2006).

Negri, Antonio. *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*. Translated by Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: Minneapolis University Press, 1991.

Newlands, Samuel. 'Hegel's Idealist Reading of Spinoza', *Philosophy Compass* 6, no. 2 (2011), 100-8.

—— 'More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza', *Philosophy Compass* 6, no. 2 (2011), 109-19.

Novalis. *Schriften in vier Bänden*. Edited by Richard Samuel. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960.

O'Regan, Cyril. *The Heterodox Hegel*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Parchment, Steven. 'The Mind's Eternity in Spinoza's *Ethics*', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38, no. 3 (2000), 349-82.

Parmenides. *The Fragments of Parmenides: A Critical Text with Introduction and Translation, the Ancient Testimonia and a Commentary*. Edited by Allan H. Coxon and Richard McKirahan. Translated by Richard McKirahan. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2009.

Peters, Francis E. *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon*. London: University of London Press, 1967.

Plato. *The Dialogues of Plato*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.

—— *Timæous*. Edited by Benjamin Jowett. Vol. III, *The Dialogues of Plato*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.

—— *The Republic*. Edited by Benjamin Jowett. Vol. II, *The Dialogues of Plato*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.

—— *Phædo*. Edited by Benjamin Jowett. Vol. I, *The Dialogues of Plato*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.

Pollock, Frederick. *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy*. London: C. Kegan Paul and Co., 1880.

Prak, Maarten. *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Quine, Willard van Orman. *Word & Object*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960.

Ray, Jonathan. *The Sephardic Frontier: The Reconquista and the Jewish Community in Medieval Iberia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacque. *Émile, ou de l'Éducation*. Edited by Maurice Masson. Fribourg: Librairie de l'Université, 1914.

Rowen, Herbert H. *John de Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland, 1625-1672*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1946.

Savan, David. 'Spinoza on Duration, Time, and Eternity'. In *Spinoza: The Enduring Questions*, edited by Graeme Hunter. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1994, 3-30.

Saw, Ruth. *The Vindication of Metaphysics: A Study in the Philosophy of Spinoza*. London: MacMillan, 1951.

Scholz, Heinrich. *Die Hauptschriften zum Pantheismum Streit zwischen Jacobi und Mendelssohn*. Berlin: Reuther and Reichard, 1916.

Shein, Noa. 'The False Dichotomy between Objective and Subjective Interpretations of Spinoza's Theory of Attributes', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 17, no. 3 (2009), 505-32.

Singer, S. *Authorised Daily Prayer-Book*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1908.

Sorrell, Tom. *The Rise of Modern Philosophy: The Tension between the New and Traditional Philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibniz*. Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1993.

Spinoza, Benedict de. *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, 3 vols. Edited by Carl H. Bruder. Lipsiae: Typis et sumptibus Bern. Tauchnitz jun., 1844.

—— *Opera*, 4 vols. Edited by Carl Gebhardt. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925.

—— *Korte Verhandeling van God, den Mensch, en des zelfs Welstand*. Edited by Carl Gebhardt. Vol. I, *Opera*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925.

—— *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiæ Pars I, et II, More Geometrico Demonstratæ Per Benedictum de Spinoza. Accesserunt Ejusdem Cogitata Metaphysica*. Edited by Carl Gebhardt. Vol. I, *Opera*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925.

—— *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*. Edited by Carl H. Bruder. Vol. II, *Opera quae supersunt omnia*. Lipsiae: Typis et sumtibus Bern. Tauchnitz jun., 1844.

—— *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*. Edited by Carl Gebhardt. Vol. II, *Opera*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925.

—— *Ethica*. Edited by Carl Gebhardt. Vol. II, *Opera*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925.

—— *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Edited by Carl Gebhardt. Vol. III, *Opera*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925.

—— *Epistolæ*. Edited by Carl Gebhardt. Vol. IV, *Opera*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925.

—— *The Emendation of the Intellect*. Translated by Edwin Curley. Vol. I, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

—— *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being*. Translated by Edwin Curley. Vol. I, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

—— *The Letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley with an introduction and notes by Steven Barbone, Lee Rice and Jacob Adler. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1995.

—— *Parts I and II of Descartes' "Principles of Philosophy"*. Translated by Edwin Curley. Vol. I, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

—— *Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts*. Translated by Edwin Curley. Vol. I, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

—— *Ethics*. Translated by Edwin Curley. Vol. I, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

—— *Theological-Political Treatise*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998.

—— *Political Treatise*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000.

Steenbakkers, Piet. *Spinoza's Ethica from manuscript to print: Studies on text, form and related topics*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1994.

Steinberg, Justin D. 'Spinoza on being *sui iuris* and the Republican Conception of Liberty', *History of European Ideas* 34, no. 3 (2008), 239-49.

Stock, Barbara. 'Spinoza on the Immortality of the Mind', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (2000), 381-403.

Strauss, Leo. 'How to study Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 17 (1947), 111-2.

Tacitus, Cornelius. *Histories*. Translated by C. H. Moore, *Loeb Classical Library*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931.

Tempier, Étienne. *La condamnation parisienne de 1277*. Edited by David Piché. Paris: Librairie Philosophique, 1999.

Vinciguerra, Lorenzo. 'Spinoza in French Philosophy Today', *Philosophy Today* 53, no. 4 (2009), 422-37.

West, David. 'Spinoza on Positive Freedom', *Political Studies* 41, no. 2 (1993), 284-96.

Wetleson, Jon. *The Sage and the Way: Studies in Spinoza's Ethics of Freedom*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1979.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922.

—— *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953.

Wolf, Abraham. *Spinoza's Short Treatise on God, Man & his Well-Being*. Adam & Charles Black, 1910.

—— *The Oldest Biography of Spinoza*. Edited by Abraham Wolf. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927.

Wolfson, Harry A. *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of his Reasoning*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934.

Young, Iris Marion. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Yovel, Yirmiyahu. *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Zac, Sylvain. *L'idée de vie dans la philosophie de Spinoza*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963.